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FEBRUARY 2007

48 10 Ways to Fix the Music Biz

With sales falling short and stores closing down, we offer advice to an ailing industry.

BY DAVID BROWNE

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Few artists deserve a following as devotional as that of Gerard

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Q&As, three of 2005's hottest acts explain how they beat the dreaded sophomore slump. BY KYLE ANDERSON, MELISSA MAERZ, AND DORIAN LYNKEY

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Garden State made them the band that "will change your life," but with a new album—and no new movie—will the

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Many say he helped sink *The Brady Bunch*, but now actor/musical savant Robbie Rist is on a mission to rescue an imperiled Los Angeles scene.

BY NANCY MILLER



"I have so much invested in this record."

THE SHINS' JAMES MERCER, PAGE 68

ON THE COVER

My Chemical Romance, photographed exclusively for *Spin* by Jennifer Tzar

Creative consultant: Mary Alice Stephenson

Production by Ullas Hahn. Grooming by Melanie Manson. Fashion assisting by Adria Heath. On Gerard Way: Calvin Klein shirt and tie. For details, see Where to Buy.

This One



PNSD-BXC-ZW12



welco
the
social

me to



"I wonder what it
would be like if we
were from France."

THE CINEMATICS' SCOTT
RINNING, PAGE 40



SPIN

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Please don't call her a blue bird: Lily Allen



FROM LEFT: TARA DARRY; DERRICK SANTINI/COURTESY CAPITOL RECORDS

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Silversun Pickups takes the roof at Spin HQ.



Rachel Antonoff, 25, writer and dressmaker, NY

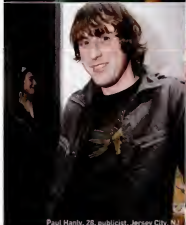
SILVERSUN PICKUPS PLAY SPIN HQ

New York City, 11.20.06

The 21st installment of Spin's in-house concert series featured L.A.'s Silversun Pickups.

Sponsored by Newcastle Brown Ale and Adidas Originals, the intimate showcase featured highlights from the L.A.-based quartet's Carnavas, opening with their bittersweet single "Well Thought Out Twinkles." After capturing fans under the spell of his chillingly angelic vocals layered over blanketed guitar and hypnotic keyboardscapes, Brian Aubert's angst-fueled outcries shook audience members with their raw honesty.

REPORTING: KATHY HEATH PHOTOS: JAY CHEN



Paul Hanly, 26, publicist, Jersey City, NJ



JENNIFER BACKSTER, Astoria, NY



The audience at Spin HQ



The Prairie Cartel's Scott Lucas rocks the mic at Chicago's Schubas Tavern.

THE PRAIRIE CARTEL HOLD UP SCHUBAS

Chicago, 11.15.06

Schubas featured the perfect mix of DJs from the Prairie Cartel and SoCo.

The Prairie Cartel's Scott Lucas and Blake Smith brought the electronic funk, experimental techno, and Hall & Oates when they DJed Chicago's Schubas Tavern for a special Spin & SoCo Event.

Playing the role of both mix master and bartender, Lucas—also half of hard-hitting duo Local H—alternated between pouring shots of Southern Comfort and manning the decks, lighting the room on fire by performing his band's electro-dancer rager "Keep Everybody Warm."

REPORTING: ANNE MALDONADO PHOTOS: JAMES MONTELEONE

The infamous Cynthia Plaster Caster cosies up with Andrew Langer of the Redwalls.



Megan Savoy, 22, bartender, Chicago, IL

Yann Geoffroy, 26, musician, Paris, France

fall out boy



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INSIDE SPIN CONTRIBUTORS



Nancy Miller

Writer, "Can Cousin Oliver Save Power Pop?" (page 74)

↑ "Nowadays the word scene is so derided, it must be put in quotes to distance ourselves from it. This saddens me," explains Miller (far right), a senior editor at *Wired*, who explored the L.A. power-pop scene with former *Brody Bunch* costar Robbie Rist. "Being part of a scene is the closest most of us dorks will ever come to being in a gang. And when you're in a gang, you commit." **Favorite power-pop band:** Big Star



Rob Levine

Writer, "The Shins' Big Adventure" (page 68)

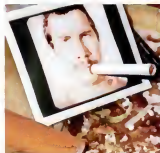
← Levine discovered the Shins' true vice. "Marty Crandall plays more video games than I do," he says. "I can't believe he has time to play in a band." Levine also writes for *Fortune* and *The New York Times*. **Favorite Shins song:** "Kissing the Lipless" **Favorite one-hit wonder:** Nena's "99 Luftballons"

Jennifer Tzar

Photographer, "Howl" (page 52)

→ "They are really sincere and down-to-earth guys doing what they're into," says Tzar of this month's cover stars. "Nothing wrong with that!" She also shoots for *Interview* and *Discover*.

Favorite music T-shirt: "My boyfriend's old Willie Nelson shirt." **First concert:** Billy Squier and Def Leppard



Tom Fowlks

Photographer, "The Shins' Big Adventure" (page 68)

← When asked what it is about the Shins that makes them stand out, Fowlks had one word to offer: "Moxie." They also possess a great deal of spontaneity," says the 35-year-old New Yorker, who also shoots for *ESPN: The Magazine* and *URB*. **Most underrated musician of all time:** Kris Kristofferson **Favorite rapper:** Muhammad Ali



The Hourly Radio
at the Penguin Store, NYC

THE HOURLY RADIO

New York City, 11.01.06

The Hourly Radio visit the Penguin Store in New York City.

In anticipation of their recent CMJ performance at New York's Don Hills, Dallas/Fort Worth natives the **Hourly Radio** (Aaron Classon, Ryan Short, Tim Jansen, and Adam Venderkolk) were treated to all the latest trends from retro fashion label **Penguin**.

PHOTO: NICK PASTULA

SPIN

A&R

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Op's Gary Sisker with
Spin's Kelly Watson

OP'S MAKAHIKI FESTIVAL

Oahu, HI, 11.11.06 - 11.12.06
The inaugural Makahiki Festival brought surfers and musicians to Oahu's North Shore.

The tradition that began at Coachella 06 returned for an eighth time at the **Op Makahiki Festival** and **Op Pro Hawaii** on the famed North Shore of Oahu, Hawaii. Between catching sets from Elan, BET, Ray Barbee, Mt. Egypt, and some in-house local artistic ensembles, concertgoers and hordes of the world's best surfers shuffled across the sand to hang ten with Spin and get their pictures taken at the Spin photobooth.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PHOTOGRAPHER, JON STEELE



Spin overbooked welcome
Amber Panske with James
Armstrong of Fane On Lax, WI



Pro surfer Otto Flores
and Andrea, Puerto Rico



Bianca and Michelle
South Shore, Oahu



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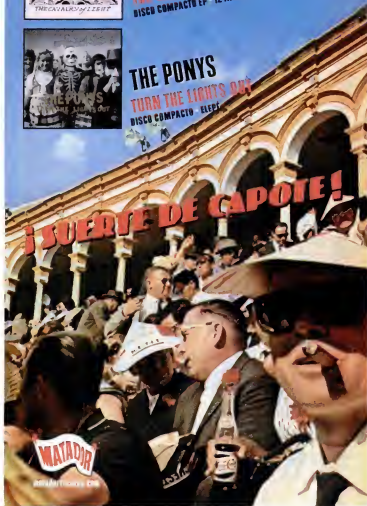
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The McCrearys
get in
SPIN 4/10/06

A New Romance

IN 1978, KISS SAVED ME. For this skinny, restless teenager, their comic-book kabuki and youth-power anthems fueled vivid adolescent dreams of a life that was, well, larger than life. The Clash and Dead Kennedys took over two years later as I became galvanized by their political fury and ferocious humor, and Kiss started sucking. Then it was the Smiths I could not play enough. Morrissey's anguished mini melodramas made me realize, *Okay, maybe it's time to put away my records and get out more.*

As I write this at the very end of 2006, My Chemical Romance have become similarly beloved by millions; they have charisma, *meaning*, and the ability shared by few new artists to forge an intense bond with their fans. It seems only natural that for a special issue dedicated to examining the State of Music, they should be the cover stars. As Timothy Gunatillaka writes, MCR signify a phenomenon not seen (or heard) since Smashing Pumpkins: a band whose adventurous music, deeply felt lyrics—their whole aesthetic, really—encourage a rapturous response that transcends mere cult. Only now, that intense devotion leads to countless confessions and testimonials on MySpace pages and message boards. It's music as therapy for the soul. And fodder for the pit.

It seems as though MCR's fans have heeded Kiss' call to "shout it, shout it, shout it out loud!" quite literally. Which reminds me—I need to take out that record again soon.

Doug Brod

Doug Brod
Executive Editor





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Photo by Jay Chen

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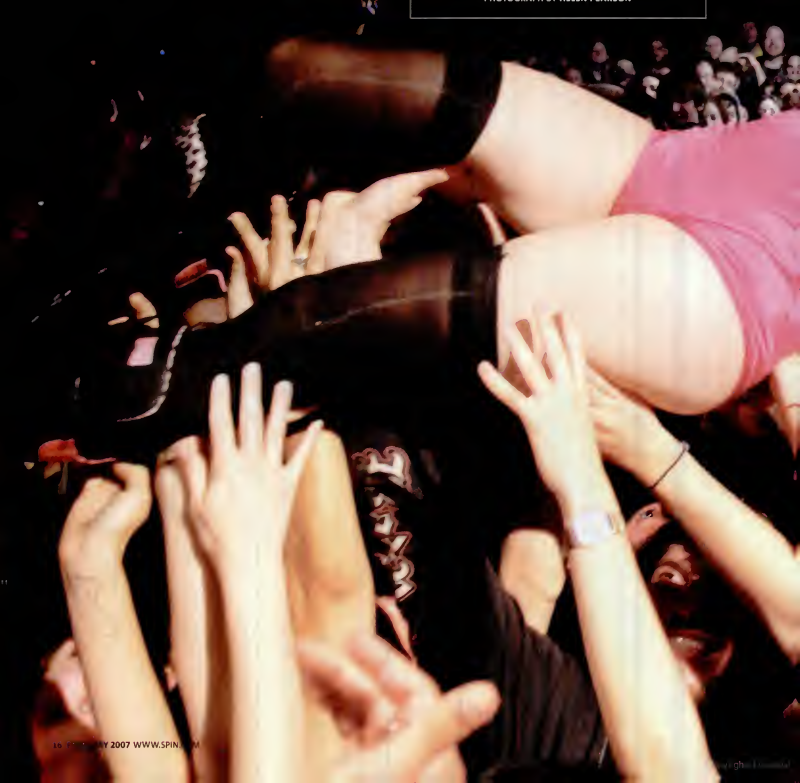
Peaches

Friday, November 24, 2006

A Peaches gig doesn't so much resemble a rock show as it does an interactive exorcism: Limbs flail, bodies fly, and the electroclash artist formerly known as Merrill Nisker mistakes the crowd for a Sealy Posturepedic. "Just another day on the job," deadpans the singer, whose tour for her *Impeach My*

Bush album wrapped in December.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HELEN PEARSON







GIBSON AMPHITHEATRE, LOS ANGELES

AFI

Saturday, December 9, 2006

At the annual Almost Acoustic Christmas concert thrown by radio station KROQ, anyone looking for a white Christmas was in luck, as AFI graced the stage with their unique color-free set. "That show was fantastic—our 50 minutes seemed like five," says singer Davey Havok. "They had spinning stages and tens of thousands of voices [in the crowd]. All we ask for next time is a catwalk."

PHOTOGRAPH BY KELLY A. SWIFT/RETNA



SOUNDCHECK





LONG BEACH ARENA, LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

Panic! At the Disco

Wednesday, December 6, 2006

"We wanted to be the band that had its own carnival," says frontman Brendon Urie about Panic! At the Disco's elaborate stage show (see review on page 96). But what if Vince Neil were to accuse them of ripping off Mötley Crüe's traveling-circus theme? "I could see why he'd be upset. We actually tried to get their circus tent, so I couldn't really disagree with him."

PHOTOGRAPH BY KELLY A. SWIFT/RETNA





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1 Papoose "CHANGE GON' COME (50 SHOTS)" Over Sam Cooke's civil-rights anthem, the monotone monologist blazes the New York police for their 50-bullet barrage at a car of unarmed men.

2 Chicken Legs Weaver "YOUR ENEMY CAN'T HARM YOU" Sounding both grizzled and funky fresh, this British trio unleashes a whipsaw slide guitar and raspy vocals, like Tom Waits with no brakes.

3 UGK, feat. Big Daddy Kane and Kool G Rap "UP NEXT" The Texas duo hooks up a fiery Juice Crew semi-reunion, with deft, head-nod production from Marley Marl.

4 Nas "SHINE ON 'EM" Russell Simmons may think it's all sweetness and light with the African diamond trade, but on this nonalbum track, Nas explores the darker side in intense detail.

5 Cold War Kids "I DON'T WANNA GROW UP" Ramshackle live cover of the Ramones' classic cover of Tom Waits becomes a spirited, heartfelt, tambourine-shakin' hootenanny. Joey would be pleased.

6 The View "SAME JEANS" Scottish blokes with a thrashy, mused charm and a gift for tossed-off melodies that Arctic Monkeys might envy. Just don't expect them to wash their pants.

7 The Dextateens "NAKED AROUND" Gutsy, soulful Southern rock with a punk sneer and a snarling twin-guitar riff, from their upcoming album coproduced by Drive-By Truckers' Patterson Hood.

8 Beirut "ELEPHANT GUN" Zach Condon looks over the remains of old Gypsy orchestras, brass-band troubadours, Revolutionary War drummers, and pub fiddlers, singing, "All that is left is all that I am."

9 Takka Takka "WE FEEL SAFER AT NIGHT" With the aw-shucks organ and conspiratorial, almost spoken-word vocals by Gabriel Levine, this Brooklyn foursome is like a more upbeat Lambchop.

10 Air, feat. Jarvis Cocker "ONE HELL OF A PARTY" The French atmospherics are back, now plucking a koto (Japanese floor harp) as background for Cocker's chilly, morning-after requiem.

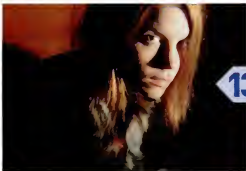
11 Wilco "LET'S FIGHT" A live version of an unreleased track that eases in with violin and piano, then swells and recedes for five minutes, with Jeff Tweedy wearily going through the codependent motions.

12 Fake Problems "MOTION OF THE OCEAN" Rollicking honky-tonk punk from these Florida tourmates of Against Me!, who debate God's existence, extensively, on a road trip to Tennessee.

13 The Last Town Chorus "BOAT" Megan Hickey's soothing, lap-steel version of David Bowie's "Modern Love" was featured on *Grey's Anatomy*, but this lyrical swoon is even more affecting.

14 Eagle*Seagull "LOCK AND KEY" The ominously stark opening and chilling sound effects (is that a dentist's drill?) percolate into a jangly waltz reminiscent of the *Being John Malkovich* theme.

15 Diligentz, feat. the Pack "PUNK ROCK (REMIX)" Apparently in the hyphy scene, being "punk rock" has something to do with looking sorta skater-ish, though not "bummy." Sounds pretty Warped to us.



Must-See Videos

Young@Heart "Schizophrenia"

This British troupe puts the Langley Schools Music Project in a time machine, as a senior-citizen chorus sings Sonic Youth's jittery classic (from 1987's *Sister*). It's great fun but turns thrilling and strangely beautiful when one soloist croons, "She's just a bitch with a golden chain." The song was jarring enough before; here, it's an even weirder slice of psychosis.

Prodigy "Mac 10 Handle"

One half of Mobb Deep works out his demons—literally. Over a minimal bass roll, Prodigy sweats in his tiny apartment, gets high, goes to a club, gets stalked by the Devil, and stabs a couch until it bleeds. The gritty presentation has a documentary feel and gives the clip an atmospheric intensity, as if the rapper's dark fever dreams were accidentally projected onto film.

Lil Scrappy "Gangsta Gangsta"

Lil Jon and 50 Cent executive-produced this Atlanta MC's solo debut, which is probably why his video looks like a Michael Bay movie shortened to five minutes. Like a lot of action flicks, the story line is beside the point, but there are enough car chases, explosions, and dead-locked men screaming, "Gangsta!" to tide you over until *Bad Boys III*.



Viva Death "Broken Nose"

In this hallucinatory clip, presented like some sort of lost 1960s educational-film nightmare, Viva Death exploit a fundamental truth: No matter what the context, carries are always unsettling. The centerpiece shot is of an old man with horrible teeth, who is apparently poking a bearded lady with a gigantic candy cane, proving that this rhythmic punk quintet knows how to fuel nightmares.

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Killers Instinct

I've read every single *Spin* story on the **Killers**, and the one in the December issue was by far the best ("Top of the Heap"). Dave Itzkoff did a great job showing how the guys have matured and how they have reinvented themselves over the last couple of years. It seems they were always destined for something bigger and better than even the bright lights of Las Vegas.

ANGELA MAI
PEORIA, ILLINOIS

Game Theory

The Game confuses me ["He Stands Alone," December]. "I want to know the name of the street you grew up on?" I wish that guy would practice what he preaches. I had jumped on the Documentary bandwagon because the beats were hot and he seemed hungry. Doctor's Advocate sounds like the same rhymes over lesser beats, and worst of all, I don't think I learned anything about him. It's interesting that the Killers were



All you need
is down:
the Killers

on the cover of that issue, because it made me realize that the Game is the Brandon Flowers of rap: He talks big, but when it comes to the wax, he's a minor league.

RONNIE SIMMONS
COLUMBUS, OHIO



Courageous Cat Power

I've always had a love/hate relationship with Chan Marshall ["The Spin Interview,"

December]. As Cat Power, she has made the sort of records I think I should like, and sound excellent when described to me, but when I finally hear them, they never end up fulfilling their promise. Thanks to Melissa Maerz's interview, I finally get it. *The Greatest* makes a lot more sense, now that I understand what she's been through and where she wants to go. I can't remember the last time I read an article that actually furthered my understanding of both the music and the musician.

REGAN DEXTRADER
WINDYVILLE, MISSOURI

Full Metal Rackt

The article on the U.S. military's use of music against detainees ["War Is Loud," December] gave me yet another reason to feel utter disgust at the way America has been conducting itself in recent years, both abroad and at home. Anything that causes post-traumatic stress disorder is, in my mind, torture, and if the governments of Europe and Israel can agree on this, how does America have the audacity to continue this behavior? America has always been the country that was supposed to protect against mindless, sadistic thugs—not to become them. I sometimes feel like I'm living in a proto-fascist state. What happened to my country?

DOMINIC GUINIANA
ASTORIA, NEW YORK

SEEING DOUBLES

Look-alike? Or not?
Beck



DEREK HILLE Age: 19
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The SPIN.COM Poll

Which buzz-heavy band is poised to have the most success with album number two?

- A Bloc Party
- B Clap Your Hands Say Yeah
- C Kaiser Chiefs

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2) Start with ICE.
POUR 1/4 part of
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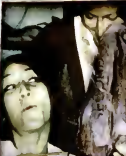
3) SHAKE IT,
SHAKE IT



4) STRAIN & ENJOY!
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add soda or cola)



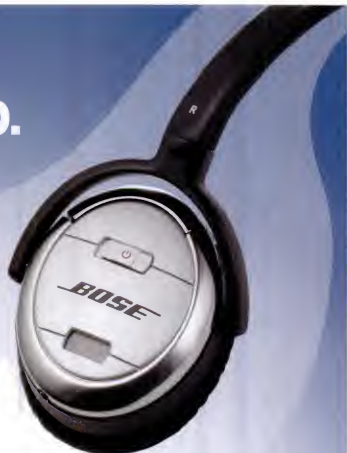
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NOISE

MUSIC NEWS AND MORE, PLAYED AT FULL BLAST



Why MySpace Won't Kill the Radio Star

In a world still dominated by broadcast media, the Internet isn't as influential as you think **BY DAVE ITZKOFF**

Without help from the Internet, you might never have heard of the Red Jumpsuit Apparatus. As frontman Ronnie Winter freely admits, the Florida emo band wouldn't have landed their record deal with Virgin if not for the enthusiastic coverage their self-released demos received on the website Kings of A&R. And they can always count on a few hundred of their 270,000 MySpace friends

to turn out for a secret show. But when it comes to selling 500,000 copies of their debut album, *Don't You Fake It*, Winter gives the Internet no props. "Let's just say MTV and Fuse have both been very generous to us," he says, "and most of the [sales] spikes I've seen are usually when one of those two channels is involved."

Winter isn't the only one who's noticed this. According to a 2006 study conducted by Jupiter Research, most music fans still rely on traditional broadcast media to help them choose albums and songs: Of the 1,600 survey respondents over the age of 18 who had purchased music within the last year, a whopping 61 percent said they'd made their decisions based on hearing a song on the radio, and 27 percent said their choices had been influenced by seeing a music video on television—which explains why acts like Nickelback and Hinder sell so many records.

By comparison, few participants used the Web when making their musical selections. Only 13 percent had been persuaded to buy a record after legally downloading a free track, and just 6 percent were inspired to make a purchase after hearing a song on MySpace; a paltry 4 percent took the suggestions of an online recommendation engine like Pandora.com.

Though people are still buying music on the Web, they aren't significantly using online tools to make those decisions, and it's not because they lack Internet access. "Everybody's online," says David Card, a senior analyst at Jupiter Research. "They just aren't listening to music [there]."

What the survey does confirm is a pronounced gap between the perceived authority of the Internet and the reality of its influence on music



The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus (actual size) try to find the escape hatch in this teeny, tiny box.

fans, which Web pioneers acknowledge is presently small. "That's the attraction of the Internet in the first place, that you can make your own little corner of the world," says Matthew Perpetua, author of the indie-rock site Fluxblog.org. While a social network like MySpace may draw millions of users a day, he says, "It's really this huge archipelago of little sites. It's not like anyone's looking at any one thing on it."

Despite the massive amount of music available on the Web, most listeners still lean toward broadcast media like radio and TV, where the selections have already been made for them. "To the mainstream consumer, a lot of choice is great on paper," says Martin Stilske, a cofounder of the music search engine Last.fm. "But it causes confusion when you're actually confronted with 'Well, which one of these three million tracks do you want?' They don't have the time to preview them all."

What studies like this do not measure is the degree to which the Internet has become a vital component of the music industry's infrastructure, and an indispensable tool for any artist unable to get chosen for *American Idol*. In their native England, electro-poppers Hot Chip were used to hearing their songs in constant rotation on Radio 1, a BBC station that reaches ten million listeners nationwide.

"Everybody's online. They just aren't listening to music there." A MEDIA ANALYST

But while promoting their most recent tour of America, the group needed help from the Internet. "An important part of spreading our music around the States came from people stumbling across us on MySpace or somehow seeing a video of us on YouTube or reading a blog that mentioned us," says singer Joe Goddard. "I don't imagine

it's because they heard us on the radio."

Winter has also noticed that people who found the Red Jumpsuit Apparatus on the Web tend to be the most passionate supporters. "The people using the Internet are more motivated," he says. "I don't care if you have blazing-fast speed, you're still going to have problems connecting to MySpace. It takes patience and determination. You're seeking it out on your own, not relying on somebody else to do the work for you."

Over the next decade, the Internet could become a more influential resource as it makes better use of its unique ability to forge connections between performers and listeners: A full 33 percent of Jupiter Research study participants between the ages of 18 and 24 said they bought an album based on a friend's recommendation—whether they received that recommendation in a phone conversation, a text message, or a MySpace e-mail—making it the third most influential factor after radio and television. When the Internet is best serving music consumers, with a mix of audio, video, and reviews, it plays the role of the most knowledgeable friend on earth—one with roughly half a billion albums in his record collection. "How can the Internet, which is a two-way communication medium, take advantage of word of mouth?" asks Jupiter Research's Card. "You can't really manufacture it, but you can make it easier for people to pass it along."

So while the Internet may not directly sell records, Winter knows that online buzz is crucial for getting people to notice you—for better or for worse. "Think about what happened to Kramer," he says, referring to actor Michael Richards' racist tirade at a West Hollywood comedy club. "Hate to bring it up, but people talked about it."

Lucky Number

WHY THE 88 ARE THE BEST BAND YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU'D HEARD



You'd think adoration from the tanned denizens of Laguna Beach and *The OC* would guarantee fame for musicians on the show's soundtracks. Alas, not everyone is Ben Gibbard. But if you're in a band, don't give up: Score the right shows and you could be riding high in an apartment whose rent you paid on time.

Unless you live in L.A.'s Silverlake neighborhood, you probably don't know the 88. But chances are you've heard their Kinky tunes, like "Coming Home" or "Hide Another Mistake," blasting in the background of *Grey's Anatomy*, *The OC*, *Weeds*, *Laguna Beach*, *How I Met Your Mother*, and at least 30 other shows. "It's tough to get on the radio," says keyboardist Adam Merrin. "But TV licensing is an incredible way of getting the music out to people who normally wouldn't hear it."

Of course, the 88's album sales haven't exactly skyrocketed since entering Seth Cohen's iPod, and they don't have distribution secured for their next record. But having no major-label affiliation has proven both a bane and a boon.



"If you're on an indie label, you can't guarantee your CDs at Best Buy," says music marketer Danny Benaï, who represents the 88 for film and TV spots. "That's a vital opportunity missed. It's a big step going from a band with lots of placements to Franz Ferdinand."

Yet this lack of corporate bureaucracy makes the 88 attractive to television. "We're easy to get ahead of," says Merrin. "Danny calls me and the deal goes through the same day."

By making anywhere from \$1,000 to \$25,000 per song, the 88 financed their third album entirely from licensing. "We need a string section. We bought a van. We're able to pay rent. We got a PlayStation to pass the time," says Merrin. Thus, the band is poised to become a rarity in the biz—self-sufficient and comfortably free from the major-label machine.

"We want a million people to hear us," says Merrin. "That's gonna happen even if no major picks us up. We'll just put out records ourselves."

TIMOTHY GUNATILAKA

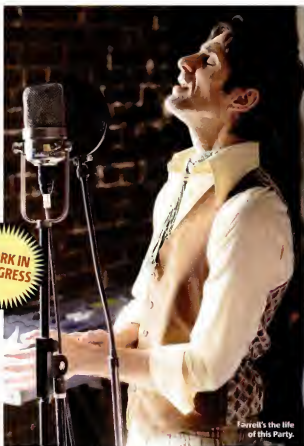
Space Is the Place

Perry Farrell and Satellite Party go galactic

Perry Farrell has been a rock star for 20 years; now he wants to be a legend. With his new album, the former frontman for Jane's Addiction and Porno for Pyros, who gave the world "Jane Says" and "Been Caught Stealing" (plus a drum'n'bass version of "Whole Lotta Love"), hopes to claim his place alongside the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and Jimi Hendrix. "Their music is eternal," he says. "I would love to be able to leave behind a body of work that could mark a certain period of time. Wouldn't it be exciting for people to say, 'Wow, remember 2007? That was the year Satellite Party came out and music changed a little bit.'"

"[We're] throwing a party up in the heavens!"

Satellite Party, a project three years in the making, was spearheaded by Farrell with the assistance of producer Steve Lillywhite and engineer/former Extreme guitarist Nuno Bettencourt. For their debut, *The Ultra Payloaded Satellite Party*, Farrell assembled a small army of collaborators, including Red Hot Chili Peppers' bassist Flea and guitarist John Frusciante, Farrell's wife Etty, film composer Harry Gregson-Williams, Fergie, New Order bassist Peter Hook, dance-makers Hybrid and Thievery Corporation, and at



least one guest from beyond the grave. Jim Morrison (via an old recording) reads a previously unreleased poem on "Woman in the Window," which also features a 30-piece orchestra. "The Doors have been a huge influence in my life, both musically and in the

shamanistic methods Jim Morrison used to speak to people," says Farrell, whose longtime friendship with the surviving members of the Doors led him to the Morrison tape.

Farrell expects the album (due in the spring on Columbia, with first single "Kinky" debuting soon) to be an otherworldly experience—literally. "The concept started as taking a weekend and throwing a party up in the heavens," he says. "Once we were there, who knows what would happen? You could be visited by a spirit. We would all be looking at the earth from the vantage point of a satellite, because we're up with the heavenly host." Look for Satellite Party to tour throughout 2007, hitting cities in the U.S., Europe, and probably Neptune.

KYLE ANDERSON

ALSO IN THE WORKS



COURTNEY LOVE Billy Corgan and Linda Perry helped Love pen tunes for *How Dirty Girls Get Clean*, which was produced by Perry and is due this spring. **WILCO** In their Chicago studio, Jeff Tweedy and Co. aim for more collaborative, spontaneous songwriting on their new album, due in May. **SUM 41** Recorded in Los Angeles and produced by frontman Deryck Whibley, the Canadians' latest (due in the spring) returns to their bratty punk roots.

The Spin

20

Ranking on Pop Culture Since 1998
BY DAVE ITRZOFF

- 1 **PRINCE PLAYS THE HALFTIME SHOW** 67 million viewers agree not to make eye contact with him
- 2 **HANDICAPPING THE GRAMMYS** Odds we'll kill ourselves if "My Humps" wins anything: 2 to 1
- 3 **MADONNA DESIGNS HER OWN H&M CLOTHES** Finally, assless chaps everyone can afford
- 4 **NEW AMERICAN IDOL AGE LIMITS** You must be old enough to remember when Paula Abdul was sane
- 5 **SEMINOLE INDIANS BUY THE HARD ROCK CAFE** Rick Nielsen's checkerboard guitar ought to make up for Manic Street Preachers
- 6 **GETTING YOUR BAND TESTED FOR POLONIUM RADIATION POISONING** Symptoms may include unhealthy glow, loss of more teeth than usual
- 7 **ELIJAH WOOD LAUNCHES A RECORD LABEL** Watch for *Precious*, and *Few: Gollum Sings the Hits!*
- 8 **WIGGLES SINGER LEAVES THE GROUP** Damn you, Yoko Ono!
- 9 **NICOLAS CAGE IS GHOST RIDER** The balding, agitated motorcycle demon
- 10 **INJURING YOURSELF WITH THE NEW NINTENDO** Extended play may leave you mentally Wii-tarded
- 11 **ANTICIPATING DONALD RUMSFELD'S NEXT JOB** Did that Wal-Mart greeter just flip us the finger?
- 12 **AT LONG LAST, A NEW STOOGES ALBUM** David Bowie's been waiting 35 years to ruin it



- 13 **ALLEY NAMED FOR FLAMING LIPS** Lies at the corner of Plushie St. and Out of Their Freaking Minds Ave.
- 14 **WILL OLDHAM'S STAND-UP COMEDY SHOW** Featuring his hilarious routine, "You might be a lonesome hypochondriac ex-redneck if..."
- 15 **CASTING REALITY STARS IN BROADWAY MUSICALS** We always thought Flavor Flav was perfect for *Fiddler on the Roof*
- 16 **HEY, HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS TELEVISION SERIES, THE WIRE?** Popular with rappers, hipsters, humans, mammals, multicellular organisms
- 17 **U.S. CURRENCY FOR THE BLIND** Five-dollar bills distinguished by the woolly texture of Lincoln's beard
- 18 **HOW TO TELL IF YOUR GIRLFRIEND IS TOO YOUNG FOR YOU** She doesn't believe Asia's "Heat of the Moment" is a real song
- 19 **PETER BOYLE, R.I.P.** By far, our favorite singing, tap-dancing Frankens-tein
- 20 **SHOCKING FACTS FROM DR. DRE'S BIO** He's just six credits short of earning his PhD in library science

ILLUSTRATION BY CAMERON STEWART

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Good Morning Revival



Scott Rinning, Adam Goemans, Ross Bonney, and Ramsay Miller, photographed in Glasgow, Scotland, November 28, 2006

The Cinematics

Dark Scottish rockers find life after Franz Ferdinand

The Cinematics aren't united by childhood friendship or a favorite band—just a hatred of Van Morrison. As teenagers in the tiny Scottish town of Dingwall, the members of the neo-new-wave group wrote original songs in competing local bands—bassist Adam Goemans and guitarist Ramsay Miller in one, vocalist Scott Rinning and drummer Ross Bonney in another—but also begrudgingly churned out covers together at middle-aged singles bars to pay the bills. While sweatin' the oldies, they tried to squeeze in songs like Radiohead's "Just," but the Viagra set preferred "Brown Eyed Girl." "That song makes me want to take a

cheese grater to my brain," Goemans laments. "Then one of the guys in the band asked me to learn 'Waterloo' by ABBA, and I just hit the roof."

Since being Dingwall's finest didn't offer much upside, the foursome formed the Cinematics and relocated to Glasgow in 2003, just as the city found itself in A&R reps' crosshairs thanks to Franz Ferdinand's breakthrough. Though they mostly eschewed the scene's angular art rock, the Cinematics sometimes had a rough time standing out, particularly since their sweet bands resemble those worn by Franz's Alex Kapranos and Nick McCarthy. "I sometimes wonder what it would be like if we were from France or

if we lost the fringes," Rinning says.

With the recent release of the Cinematics' debut, *A Strange Education* (TVT), Rinning won't need that pair of shears, not after he wails like a dour choirboy on the darkly lush post-punk anthem "Human" or tackles falsetto on the sly Britpop gem "Chase." Those vocals are garnering comparisons to Jeff Buckley and reeling in early adopters like Snow Patrol's Gary Lightbody. "Gary started turning up at our shows, and his enthusiasm was still there six months later," says Miller. "We can always draw on that for a confidence boost."

And if their brief travels in America are any indication, being from Glasgow won't mean a damn thing. "Last night we played in New Jersey, and we told the sound man we were from Scotland," Rinning says. "He asked if that was near Finland."

BY PETER GASTON
PHOTOGRAPH BY TARA DARBY

FAST FACTS

→ **Bassist Adam Goemans** grew up alongside the famous Loch Ness lake.

→ **While recording their album at Peter Gabriel's Real World studios**, the band frequently hijacked his Segways.

→ **The Cinematics' favorite soundtracks:** *The Virgin Suicides*; *Kill Bill*, Volume 1; *Boogie Nights*; *Garden State*

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Damon Albarn,
Simon Tong, Paul
Simonon, and Tony Allen

The Good, the Bad and the Queen

Damon Albarn and famous friends pay their respects (and disrespects) to London

Damon Albarn set lofty ambitions for his latest collection of songs? As if. How about a conceptual ode to London's millennia-old history? "I'm trying to find new ways of saying, 'This is the city I live in,'" the 38-year-old singer says, "that is by a river...that was once covered in forests...that all got cut down...then turned into a town...and it grew...then got burned down...then grew again...then got bombed...then grew again."

Enlisting former Clash bassist Paul Simonon, Afrobeat veteran Tony Allen, ex-Verve guitarist Simon Tong, and producer Danger Mouse, Albarn wrote the album

The Good, the Bad and the Queen—summing up the British capital's inhabitants—as a swan song for Tony Blair's fading premiership. (Though they officially go by the same moniker as their debut, Albarn insists the band is nameless.) An arch-critic of the Blair-Bush love-in, Albarn explains that the line "Drink all day 'cause the country's at war," from the dubby "Kingdom of Doom," is a reference to the nihilism of Brits more interested in the U.K.'s year-old 24-hour drinking laws than the daily death toll in Iraq. "How close does something have to get before it's real?" he asks.

Albarn, who's spent time writing and recording in Nigeria and Mali, says it was Danger Mouse (a.k.a. Brian Burton) who

FAST FACTS

→ Albarn is currently writing an opera based on the Chinese legend "The Monkey King."

→ Artist Banksy's painting for the cover of Blur's 2003 album, *Think Tank*, recently sold for more than \$122,000.

→ Terry Gilliam (*Brazil*, *12 Monkeys*) is in talks to direct a film starring the cartoon members of Gorillaz.

suggested he focus more on his Englishness. "Brian said one song sounded too close to *The Lion King*," he admits, grinning. Still, Albarn knows how to pen a pop tune: With Blur and Gorillaz, he's writtenaching ballads, thrash-pop anthems, giddy electro-pop melodies, and even a track that made Dennis Hopper tuneful (sort of). But the moody drum'n'bass wall of "Herculean" and the opiated jazz shuffle "Behind the Sun" are not as accessible as his previous work. "They take quite a few listens to..." He stops. "Yeah, they are odd," he concedes. And that's the way he wants it.

BY CRAIG MCLEAN
PHOTOGRAPH BY PENNIE SMITH



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Igor Volk, Sarah Jones, Tahita Bulmer, Andy Spence, and Lou Hayter

New Young Pony Club

Fashionable Brits take up electro disco, get branded "new rave"

WHO: Two years ago Tahita Bulmer (vocals) and Andy Spence (guitar) bolted from self-described "really crap" bands to form New Young Pony Club with a manifesto: Looks are more important than talent. "We can't play our instruments, but all successful bands had at least one person who couldn't play," says Bulmer. Then she pauses. "Maybe not Radiohead."

After recruiting Igor Volk (bass), Lou Hayter (keyboards), and Sarah Jones (drums), the fashion-forward Brits debuted with a combination of stylish clothes, Blondie-meets-ESG electro disco, and all-around sauciness. "[The name] Pony Club conjures imagery of sweet girls in jodhpurs, but also German businessmen

being pulled around wearing leather accoutrements in a dark club," says Bulmer.

WHAT: The group's breakthrough art-funk single, "Ice Cream," featured in a recent Intel commercial, continues the lascivious theme with lyrics such as "Drink me like a liqueur / Come and dip your dipper." "It's fairly rude," Bulmer admits. "Food and sex are definitely our two favorite topics of conversation. You meet other bands and they're talking about, like, guitar straps."

Released on Modular, home to Wolfmother and the Presets, NYPC's self-titled debut EP caused the U.K. music press to corral the group into England's DIY dance scene, tagging them "new

FAST FACTS

→ Bulmer collects historical war memorabilia: "Hot Nazi helmets or anything scary. Books on strategy. That's a bit weird if you're a girl—and attractive."

→ They think the British poet **Lord Byron** was the first rock star (though he never wrote any songs). "He got kicked out of his country and shagged his sister," says Bulmer.

rave," alongside Hot Chip and Klaxons. "Ugh!" snorts Bulmer. "Although it's true lots of bands share this idea of 'find a warehouse and bounce up and down until the police come and chuck us out.' It's like a 1930s Mickey Rooney musical: 'Let's do the show right here!'"

HAVING THEIR CAKE AND EATING IT: The video for "Ice Cream" features 40-foot statues of candy and a giant revolving cake. "Our mantra is: It's got to be fun," says Bulmer. "Young folk in the 1970s would go see a band and dance. Now people just stroke their chins. I like the idea that people come to see us and it's this bacchanalia: people getting off with each other."

And do they? "It depends how late we go onstage. We play at nine o'clock; chin stroking. We play at 1 a.m.: bacchanalia... We try to go on as late as possible."

BY JOHNNY DAVID
PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID ELLIS

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SPIN

FEBRUARY 2007

THE STATE OF MUSIC

At a time when what you're hearing, and how you're hearing it, is changing as never before, we take a look at a band that (literally) saves lives, indie-pop heroes readying a great leap forward, three returning champs, plus...a very Brady surprise.

The CD business is broken, record stores are closing, and superstars just ain't selling like they used to. It's time to open up the machine, examine the parts, and offer some advice.





CONSIDER IT A TRADITION right up there with New Year's resolutions. Each January, everyone you know—and many people you don't—grouse about the state of music. Artists, record company employees, scene makers, the guy behind the counter at the local indie shop, and, of course, those annoying music journalists complain about the horrific albums that hit *Billboard*'s top spot, the quality ones that bombed, the latest deplorable trends in record-making or rock fashion, and how the business doesn't seem to know what it's doing anymore, and everything's going to musical hell. * We know you've heard it all before. We've heard it all before. But this time, trust us—it's different. Very different. Even we don't know where to begin. * Actually, we do: at one particular Tower Records location in New York City, two weeks and counting before the store closes (along with the majority of its 89 nationwide siblings). Inside, as part of the chain's liquidation following its bankruptcy, a music fire sale

is on. It's surreal enough to see EVERYTHING MUST GO! signs in the windows of this once formidable store, and even stranger to walk in and encounter a huge display of unsold CDs of Thom Yorke's *The Eraser*, marked down to three bucks. And, hey, look at all those hip-hop discs slashed to the same price! The last time new compact discs were three bucks was—well, never, actually. Deeper inside the store, the Tower carcass is being picked clean. Employees are pulling down promo posters from the walls. The bins, rifled through for bargains, look as if they've been roughed up in a bar fight. It's a funeral for Tower—and, by implication, the oldfangled record store itself.

Now let's travel to the city's east side, to offices tucked away on the 17th floor of a building near Grand Central Terminal. Here resides the headquarters of eMusic, the digital subscription-service cyberstore that specializes in all things alternative, indie, and relatively grown-up. (Van Morrison and Creedence Clearwater Revival rate highly on their best sellers list, alongside Sufjan Stevens and Spoon.) eMusic is, in many ways, the anti-Tower, starting with its atmosphere: no neon, no blaring music, just a bunch of employees in cubicles clicking away at computers and catering to the retailer's 225,000 customers.

Sitting in a relatively neat and organized office, sporting a nicely pressed red sweater, is the company's officious president and CEO, David Pakman. At 37, Pakman grew up with albums but admits he's not nostalgic about their passing.

He hasn't made a final pilgrimage to Tower and may not. He has two dead iPods at home, though he doesn't seem particularly bummed about it, and he's encouraged about Microsoft's new Zune, which, like the iPod, can play songs and albums purchased from eMusic's extensive catalog.

"People are listening to music," Pakman says. "They're just not paying for it, either at all or in a way that the industry can capitalize on. It's not like people are going, 'I don't like music anymore.' That would be a real problem. It's just that the business hasn't evolved." Or perhaps it has evolved, but into something no one seems to fully understand. Not yet, anyway.

Pop music, and the industry that has engulfed and propelled it, used to be relatively easy to figure out. Millions of people bought CDs (and, before that, LPs and cassette tapes), resulting in huge profits for the major labels. The single was profitable and popular, but the album lorded over it. The Internet was an interesting phenomenon, but people who wanted to buy albums (in whatever format) would have to go to structures called "record stores." Teenagers risked to buy more of those CDs than people twice their age. Credible artists risked cries of "Sellout!" when their music ended up on TV. John Mayer was a crooning balladeer with seemingly no political bones in his lanky body, and Tenacious D was a jockey club act that never stood a chance of setting foot on an arena stage.

Ah, what a different world it was back in...2002.

Compare that scenario with the topsy-turvy one right now, one that's making everyone's head reel. Sure, Green Day and My Chemical Romance are keeping alive the romantic notion of the rock album as Big Highly Produced Statement. But thanks to piracy, cynicism, and a generation with no sentimental connection to the artistry of the album, CD sales are on the decline; some estimate that within a few years, the format will have gone the way of vinyl. We are once again in a singles culture, as people share files illegally, and digitally rip, and rip apart, albums to ferret out their favorite tunes. Digital sales

via the Internet are creeping up; consumers still clinging to the CD are more likely to shop at Wal-Mart or Starbucks than at a record store. Teenagers are buying less physical music, which is now in the hands of those geezers over the age of 25. New bands actually want to hear their songs used on commercials and on TV shows, since they stand a greater chance of earning cash—and getting exposure—from those outlets than by signing with a major.

Oh, and John Mayer is now pondering the state of the world, and Tenacious D headlined the 20,000-seat Madison Square Garden last fall.

Those are hardly the only long-established rules that no longer seem to apply. The drop-off in disc sales means bands are now making more money from touring than before. That's assuming their tours are successful, since fans seem more inclined to venture to festivals like Bonnaroo or Lollapalooza or, even stranger, visit Second Life, which hosts virtual "concerts" by pixelated versions of Regina

Spector and Duran Duran. The "people" attending Second Life concerts are avatars of site members, who can also buy music and merch. Also, after years of listening to MP3s, often through computer speakers, no one seems to acknowledge that much music now sounds a little crappy. (Even eMusic's Pakman admits, "As soon as MP3s began being traded in the billions, any idea of audio fidelity went out the window.") The music world is so nutty right now that in December 2006, *Billboard* began publishing a chart of the Top 10 ring-tones—surely the death knell of the song, much less the album.

Then there's the music itself. Alt-rock bands from the Hold Steady to the Killers are aping Bruce Springsteen, of all people. It's as if no one who's indie wants to sound that way anymore. Based on the continuing success of emo (or punk pop) and

Warped Tour, everyone's counting on Saves the Day to...save the day.

"I've had conversations with people who say it's all going to collapse," says one former label executive who now works with indie bands. "People at labels have no long-term plan to save the business. And we don't have a business model anyway. What we have now is not sustainable." Talking about the impact of the iPod and similar devices, not to mention the bootlegs fans tune in to on YouTube, MySpace, Hype Machine, or other sites, he adds, sounding almost suicidal, "The concept of albums is lost, and the concept of anything sounding good is in deep trouble." The exec is now in the midst of trying to convince a buzz-heavy MySpace act that it's okay to sign a record deal, when all the singer/songwriter wants to do is sell his songs to *The OC* and play small clubs.

"Stop making sense," David Byrne sang more than 20 years ago, when the old-school record biz was entering a golden period that would culminate with the glitzy, teen-pop-fueled, cash-rich '90s. But if the business wants to survive in any sense whatsoever, perhaps it had better start making sense pretty soon.

What, then, to do about it all? How can the business reboot itself and adapt to changing musical and technological times? Here are a few ideas.



The view from Manhattan's Fourth and Broadway

Make CDs cheaper. This is so obvious you wouldn't think it should have to be spoken. But we're saying it anyway. After two decades, CDs should not be more expensive than they once were.

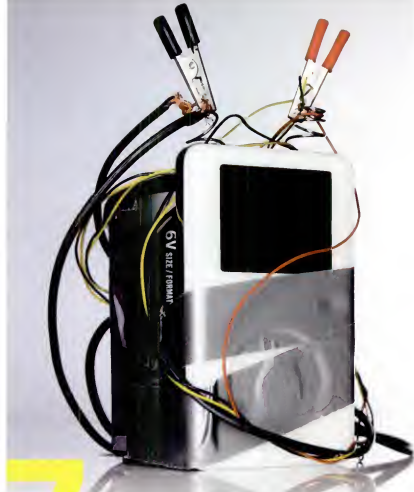
Stop indulging artists. The prime example of this trend—and one that has even further hammered home the idea that the CD is a bloated, overpriced behemoth that no one should waste money on—is the dreaded double disc. Only artists who want more royalty revenue (and who could use a good editor) need them, and we mean everyone from Christina Aguilera to Red Hot Chili Peppers to OutKast. (As nerds, though, we're fine with those double-disc expanded editions of classic albums—B-sides, outtakes, and alternate versions have to go somewhere, right?) Also, stop releasing upgraded versions of albums released mere months before. That means you, Bruce, and you, Usher. We don't want to have to buy the same record twice.

Have a TV network launch the songwriting equivalent of *American Idol*. It's no secret that the beat has overtaken melody in pop songwriting. It's time for that to change. A wall-popping beat or a mixture of groove and sample can still be a wonderful thing. But we need good songs and lots of them. Fast.

Give up the ghost of the blockbuster album. The old business model—that one mega-platinum release would sustain hundreds or thousands of flops—was crazy enough. But disc sales (and audience fragmentation) are now such that even a hugely hyped Jay-Z comeback album can drop 80 percent in sales during its second week. Take eMusic's cue and subscribe to the Long Tail theory put forth in Chris Anderson's book of the same name: Look to modest sales of lots of music to sustain the biz, rather than hoping the next Kelly Clarkson moves a gazillion units.

Only release certain kinds of music on CD. The fact that Barry Manilow was able to reclaim the No. 1 spot on the album chart with his karaoke-style covers albums proves conclusively that boomers are buying more CDs than younger music fans. So if a particular CD is mainly going to appeal to someone below the age of 30, go digital—it'll be better for the environment, too.

Cut concert ticket prices. Since bands may have to rely on touring for even more of their income, it's vital that people be able to afford to see them. In terms of sustaining a business, it's ominous enough that the Stones and U2 remain the top-grossing live acts. Coldplay and Nickelback did well last year too, but not enough to crack the Top 10, according to *Polistar* editor-in-chief Gary Bongiovanni. "It's been great while it's been lasting," he says, "but how much longer can it go?"



Stop making it so hard to choose between formats. iPod? Zune? And which file-sharing format should we use? Which one is hooked up with digital rights-management software, restricting access to certain copyrighted material? (The right idea: A recent Norah Jones single, sold without DRM format, plays on any platform.) And while we're at it, Apple: Start making longer-lasting iPods. It's a genius product, but do we have to buy another one so soon?

Fully embrace the Web. Instead of making threats when an unauthorized song or video shows up on MySpace or YouTube, majors should welcome the exposure. In its early days, MTV made you want to buy records and go to shows. The Web has the ability to provide those same thrills.

Reinvent the record store. We're approaching a time when anyone who walks into a record store will truly be like those obsessives in *High Fidelity*. So why not cater to them? Sell only indie, alt rock, and hip-hop, not to mention vinyl and every type of iPod and iPod competitor.

Stop releasing crap. Again, this should be obvious, but let's go through the list of the kind of records that are reducing music as an art form—and its place in the culture. No more records by celebrities without discernible vocal talent. And, of course, no more Rod Stewart covers collections. The guy was great at one time—every iPod should come loaded with his cover of "I'll Know I'm Losing You." But enough already. The music biz relying on ol' Rod to keep things afloat is akin to auto makers hoping there's enough oil in the world to last forever: There isn't. And it's time to take that new hybrid, whatever it may be, out for a test drive. ☼

THE STATE OF MUSIC

HOW



My Chemical Romance wax passionate about their rabid fans, contemplate

A photograph of the band The Black Parade standing in a garden. On the left, two band members stand behind a taxidermied werewolf lying on the ground. On the right, another band member stands with his hand on his hip. The garden is filled with various plants, including tall orange flowers and succulents. The background shows trees and foliage.

Photographed in Balboa
Park in San Diego,
December 10, 2006

FROM LEFT On Ray Toro:
Diesel jeans. On Bob
Byars: Guess jeans. On
Frank Iero: Calvin Klein
jeans pants. On Mikey
Way: Energie jeans. On
Gerard Way: Calvin Klein
shirt and tie. For details,
see Where to Buy.

By Timothy Gunatilaka
Photographs by Jennifer Tzar

saviorhood and recount the (near) death march that became *The Black Parade*

You rock...
You are my life...
You are many people's lives...
You save lives...*

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE SAVE LIVES

It's the kind of cute, gimmicky slogan that tempts headline writers whenever the morbidly military-garbed superstars grace the press with their cosmetically clouded faces and lofty declarations about mortality. Yet it's not until you surf the pages of *ImNotOkay.net* and *MyChemicalRomanceForum.com*, or witness a thousand teens in the pit, roaring, "I am not afraid to keep on living!" in a communal burst of affirmation, that this claim of salvation becomes a palpable principle.

"It's the mantra of the band," says bassist Mikey Way, from MCR's tour bus, which has just traveled 34 hours, from San Diego to the Riverside Theater, in frigid Milwaukee. "Kids would say they were gonna kill themselves, then they heard our music. It's great when you can impact someone like that. It's our mission."

I even wrote my suicide letter. I even planned a date that I was going to kill myself. But then, My Chemical Romance came into my life.... They helped me believe that I wasn't alone, that someone actually cares. Their music inspires me so much. And I cannot thank them enough for giving me a reason to live. For giving me a reason to be myself. Thank you, MCR, for saving my fucking life.

The My Chemical Romance phenomenon bridges two of the new millennium's most significant, if far-flung, cultural convulsions: the tragedy of 9/11 and the launch of MySpace. That's heady stuff for a Jersey band that thrashed around that state's basement punk scene before graduating, in 2004, to lavish arena rock and the kind of worshipful success that has made earnest believers of even themselves. Not that the role of pomp rock'n'roll savior didn't take some getting used to. With every online post crediting them with rescuing another soul, devotion to the band approaches religious fervor. "I'd meet these kids that were outsiders," says frontman Gerard Way. "And I realized they're looking to us for the answer. It started to scare me."

Any fear of that responsibility has since turned into an embrace.

On the strength of their 2002 debut album, *I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love*, these former misfits—Mikey, 26, his brother Gerard, 29, drummer Bob Bryar, 27, and guitarists Frank Iero, 25, and Ray Toro, 29—built a die-hard following playing New Jersey basements and VFW halls. But it wasn't until 2004's *Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge* and the video-driven success of its post-Weezer anthem of teenage disaffection ("I'm Not Okay (I Promise)" and the maniacal dirge "Helena" that My Chemical Romance found their voice.

*All posts taken from *MySpace* and the message boards of *ImNotOkay.net*, and *MyChemicalRomanceForum.com*. They have been edited for clarity.

And the voice of a new generation of jaded youth—the unloved, the overlooked, the burned, bruised, and battered, punks, preps, jocks, and the sworn enemies of punks, preps, and jocks.

Fittingly for a band that, more than any other since Smashing Pumpkins' mid-'90s run, has had tremendous therapeutic impact on its fan base, they often soundcheck with the Pumpkins' "Zero." Consummate Corgan pupils that they are, MCR followed *Three Cheers* with a dip into the infinite sadness: last fall's ambitious *The Black Parade*, replete with Mellon Collie-meets-Night at the Opera bravado, plus a flash of Sgt. Pepper's panache.

They appeal to the darker side of my personality that I suppress to be the happy bunny most people think I am.

The *Black Parade* furthers a mystical connection to 9/11 that's been with MCR since budding comic-book artist Gerard witnessed the Twin Towers crumble and immediately resolved to start a band and change the world. In fact, the new album's first single, "Welcome to the Black Parade," received its initial radio play within a week of September 11, 2006. "There was no plan behind that," says Toro. "It was a coincidence. But it's crazy that whenever [the 9/11 anniversary] passes, it always brings me to the band."

Sonically and thematically, the new album represents, as Mikey puts it, "the definitive My Chemical Romance." If abandoning the noir emo of the first two albums for the Queen-channeling bombast of *The Black Parade* seemed like an odd leap to some, it didn't to Toro. "Our sound has matured into what we always wanted," he says. "[From the start], we envisioned ourselves as a big rock band that played epic songs. It just took awhile to get there."

Likewise, the band has moved beyond its funeral fashion obsessions and macabre lyrical preoccupations and toward a more affirming message. Using the fictional story of a protagonist called the Patient, *The Black Parade* delivers a carpe diem call. "He's an Everyman who realizes his time is up," Iero says, referring to the Patient. "He didn't live his life to the fullest and wishes he had another chance."

Each of the band's albums involves some kind of story line (*Bullets* follows a couple of Bonnie and Clyde types; *Three Cheers* recounts the devilish efforts of a man—possibly the Clyde figure—to reunite with his late lover), but Gerard isn't coy about it. "Every fiction the band has used is just a layer over very personal things," he says. "That first record's about a bad breakup. The second's about my grandma's death. And the third's about making the choice to live your life." It's this last concept that has rallied the band's most fragile and rabid followers.

"What sticks out in my mind when we play," says Bryar, "are kids just breaking down and crying in the front row. Perhaps that happens to a lot of bands...but it's different for us. The music brings out shit in them. It's a release."

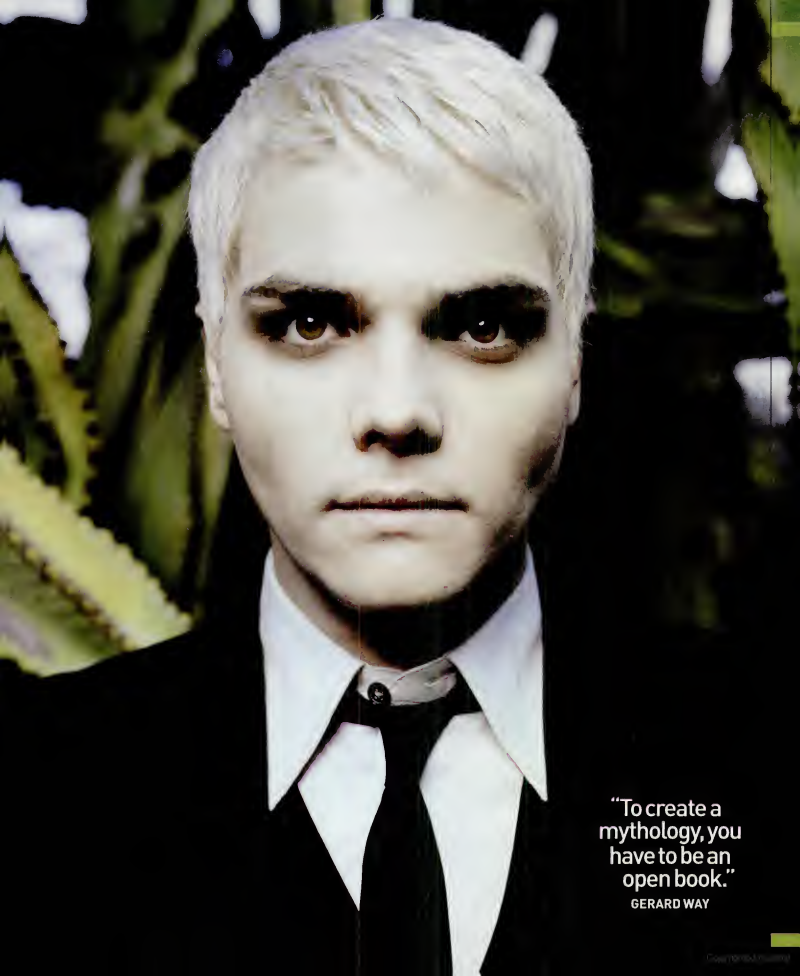
They fill a void...a missing part of me...a part of my heart and soul...a part of my confidence. Their music makes me happy. Their music makes me feel beautiful.

"Sometimes, honestly, I feel we're moderating [a support group]," says Gerard. "We tap into dark stuff from the high school years, and it's our responsibility to bring kids a positive, nonviolent solution." Without dismissing the collective catharsis provided by MCR concerts (which continue in late February with the first leg of an arena tour), the impact of the mosh pit pales next to the band's powerful online presence.

MCR's MySpace page boasts over 3,000 comments per day—ranging from thank-you notes to appeals for like-minded allies. (By comparison, the daily comments on the Strokes' MySpace page barely number 150.) The fan sites and message boards transcend mere idol worship, though. They offer visitors a forum to discuss topics ranging from the relatively mundane (fashion) to the deeply troubling (cutting yourself). Threads titled "My Chemical Suicide Story" or "It's a Band to Save Your Life" not only honor the group but also have helped establish MCR as the avatars of a superhighway support system. "The fans look out for each other," notes Mikey. "It's like a gang—but not in a negative way."

They have given me a reason to live and to keep on living. Seriously, if it wasn't for them, I would be dead right now...MCR are like my guardian angels. lol

But who's looking out for the band? Turns out even saviors need salvation.



"To create a
mythology, you
have to be an
open book."

GERARD WAY

"Rock music is
becoming stale.
Let's put the
fun back."

RAY TORO



While recording *The Black Parade* last year in Los Angeles, MCR moved into the allegedly haunted Paramour Mansion. "When you're in a band like this, there's this persistent feeling of being torn apart by external forces, that you're always surrounded by wolves waiting to eat you," explains Gerard. The combination of the Paramour's *Shining*-esque dimensions and the overwhelming expectations for *Three Cheers*' follow-up apparently proved too much for Mikey, who suffered what he calls "a series of nervous breakdowns" before temporarily leaving the band.

"All the things that have happened in my life, mixed with the expectations, collapsed on me," Mikey says, alluding to among other things, his clinical depression and his father's (nonfatal) heart attack during the *Three Cheers* tour. "I started mixing antidepressants with alcohol, which made me manic-depressive. I had this feeling I wouldn't make it through another record, so I left."

Mikey's hiatus forced the members to reconsider the project and ultimately galvanized the rest of the band, who were battling their own doubts and fears.

"The anxieties and pressures started to build and give me nightmares, too," recalls Gerard. "When [Mikey left], we finally had to face these issues. I had found this painting called *March of the Saints* in this dungeon bathroom in the house and thought about processions, Joan of Arc, stuff from childhood, all this Catholic guilt and doubt. I started investigating that and soon saw patterns in the songs."

With Mikey back in the fold, the band responded to Gerard's *Parade* epiphany with a surge of creativity that yielded the album's most exhilarating moments ("Cancer," "Sleep"), culminating in "Famous Last Words." "That song's so undeniably powerful because it was born out of that period," says Gerard.

And yet the anthem, with its clarion chorus, "I am not afraid to keep on living," had to survive crisis before it could deliver catharsis.

I think I just died. I love it 'cause it's not an ordinary performance video, where bands just...well, play. It actually shows MCR doing their thing. Their intensity. Like the part when Frank suddenly stops playing and sits on his knees gasping. And the end, with Bob's injury, breaks my heart every time.

In August, Bob Bryar nearly died while filming the video for "Famous Last Words." And his wasn't even the first injury associated with the clip. Earlier in the shoot, Gerard destroyed the ligaments in one ankle after, he says, he was "tackled accidentally" by Iero.

"WHITE MAKEUP & HAIRPIECES"

MCR cheer the bands that are bringing them joy

Gerard Way

"NERVOUS CABBAGE. The singer is Middle Eastern, trained over there, and he applies that kind of singing to indie rock. Also, one of my biggest influences is a Victorian band that broke up, **STIFFS, INC.** [right] They are more or less the template for My Chem and *The Black Parade*. They sounded like late-'70s punk, but their aesthetic was white makeup and hairpieces. Antony of Antony and the Johnsons produced their first record."

Mike Way

"KILL HANNAH from Chicago. They're amazing. They've got that mid-'90s shoegaze sound."

Frank Iero

"HOT LIKE (A) ROBOT from San Diego. Kinda like '90s grunge and late-'90s indie rock. And there's this hip-hop artist, **DAVID COSTA**, I'm really into."



Bob Bryar

"MUZE. They're huge in Europe and they need to be huge here. Same with **THRICE**."

Ray Toro

"RISE AGAINST write great songs and people are starting to take notice, so I'm really psyched. I'm also really interested in the next record by **PANIC! AT THE DISCO**. I hope they take the theatrical stuff they did on the last one and push it further."

This video sequel to the new album's "Welcome to the Black Parade" clip shows the band performing before the *Black Parade* float, which has been set ablaze in some barren wasteland. On the set, Bryar was positioned too close to the flames and his pants caught fire. Watch the video closely and you can see the accident unfold in real time.

Bryar's third-degree burns called for a skin graft, but rather than go to the hospital, the drummer found a doctor to treat his wounds in his hotel room. A staph infection followed, which spread with abandon. "An abscess was resting on my brain," Bryar says. "I couldn't move, I couldn't talk. When I tried to leave the hospital, they said I'd die in two days if I left. So I sat back down."

But for Bryar, that wasn't the worst of it. "We canceled three shows," he laments. "I hate canceling shows. We pride ourselves on giving fans something to do. If they are going through some shit, they can go to a show and heal. I didn't want to let anyone down."

Real men wear makeup.

From the gothic glissades of "Helena" to the apocalyptic cavalcade of "Black Parade," MCR are dedicated to the visual side of music-making—as if Bryar's "sweet scar" (as he now calls it) and the unnatural stiffness on the left side of his face weren't sufficient proof.

"The visual element is another tool that helps tell the story," Toro says. "The videos are an exercise in creativity—the fun stuff where you let your wildest imagination come to life. Rock music is becoming stale. Let's put the fun back."

In addition to MCR, bands like Fall Out Boy and Panic! at the Disco are returning rock videos to their mid-'90s glory days, when highly conceptual, story-oriented, and just plain awesome clips like Pearl Jam's "Jeremy" and Smashing Pumpkins' "Tonight, Tonight" reigned. But the man most responsible for this charge stands surprisingly unscathed.

"Sometimes I think it has gone so far that it takes away from the music," says Gerard, a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* freak who now models MCR's aesthetic on the films of Jean-Pierre Jeunet (*City of Lost Children*) and Terry Gilliam (*Brazil*). "I question it because I believe that much in the music. When we talk about this arena tour, we talk about how can we keep it a rock show, how can we keep it about the five people. The visuals give your work its art, but the part that saves lives is how forthcoming we are with personal information and the music."

Indeed, that honesty can get muddled amid too much makeup. This never seemed more apparent than on the 2006 live CD/DVD *Life on the Murder Scene*, which features footage of a visibly intoxicated Gerard Way throwing up behind a bus. "One of the hardest things to deal with is looking foolish," says Gerard, who's been sober for two years. "To create a mythology, you have to be an open book. It lends a certain truth to that mythology. It was important to show how foolish I was and send a message that there's no glamour [in that]."

Find that one thing that fills you with utter joy, and hold on to it, as long as you can.

My Chemical Romance do not care about being called sellouts. They abandoned their screamo origins. And they relish their place next to Fergie on *TRL*. "If you can reach more people, you'd be stupid not to do it," proclaims Bryar. "We never waved the punk-rock flag, and we've always been honest about our ambitions beyond playing basements," adds Gerard, which could mean an even softer sound on future albums, to the dismay of punk loyalists in basements everywhere. "I already feel we want to create something new," Toro says, "maybe even get away from what this record sounds like and strip it down. Put out something more raw."

MCR may welcome their pop appeal, but they stress that they serve a higher power. "The kids who've been at the front of the barricade for four years are proud to hear us on pop radio," says Gerard. "They know that means things are changing. There could come a time when you hear 'Cancer' followed by 'My Humps' on the same station. That's nothing short of amazing. When you get that big, you're having an effect on culture."

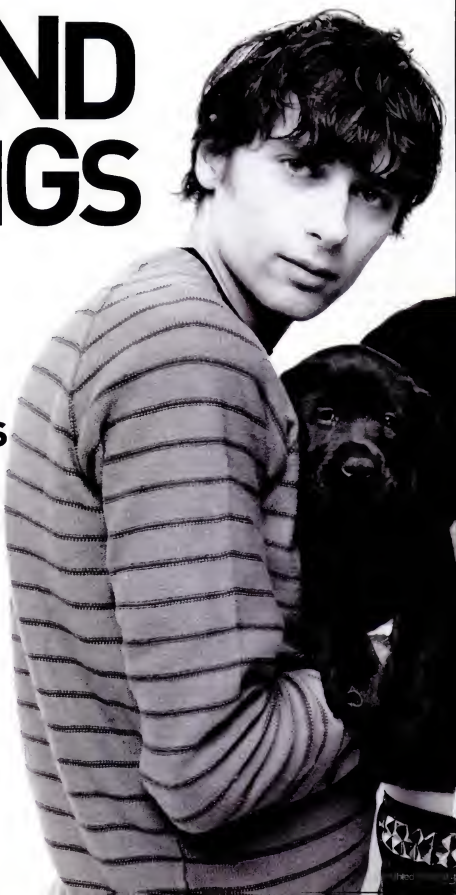
And for MCR, what does that effect translate to? Hope regained. Lives no longer on the brink of oblivion.

"When this stops being special, when we become part of the problem, it will be time to quit," Gerard says. "It can happen next record or five records from now. When this stops meaning something, we'll all walk away." ☘

THE SECOND COMINGS

Following up
their divinely
inspired debuts,
Bloc Party,
Clap Your Hands
Say Yeah, and
Kaiser Chiefs
reveal how
they avoided
the doggone
sophomore
slump

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
KENNETH CAPPELLO





Bloc Party

Photographed in New York, December 6, 2006

FROM LEFT On Gordon Moakes: H&M sweater.

On Russell Lissak: Levi's jeans, Trash & Vaudeville belt. **On Matt Tong:** Lacoste shirt, Levi's jeans. **On Kelle Dierkes:** Fred Perry shirt.

For details, see Where to Buy.

BLOC PARTY

YOU'D THINK KELE OKEREKE WOULD BE WORRIED. HIS BAND, BLOC PARTY, ARE ABOUT TO DROP THEIR SECOND ALBUM, and they recently had to pull out of a support slot on the Panic! At the Disco tour. Music bloggers obsessed over *Silent Alarm*, the Essex, England-based band's 2005 debut, and Okereke knows expectations are huge. But he, guitarist Russell Lissack, bassist Gordon Moakes, and drummer Matt Tong also realize that for many, the lightning of hype rarely strikes twice. "We know we're not going to be the cool new blog thing this time around," Okereke says. "We just have to work at attracting people in other ways." * Their follow-up, *A Weekend in the City*, may just do that. A radical departure from *Silent Alarm*, it's a dark epic that eschews fidgety punk funk for riveting storytelling—less Gang of Four, more 1984. Over two days in New York, here's what the band had to say. **KYLE ANDERSON**

How is the perception of Bloc Party different here than it is in the U.K.?

OKEREKE: I don't know what the perception of us is in America. I just know that when we play shows, lots of people seem very excited to see us.

MOAKES: Musically, we've grown up on anything but the traditional English mod upbringing. Any bands in England that do well always talk about the Kinks, the Rolling Stones, the Jam, the Beatles—bands like that. Whereas we're about very diverse backgrounds, whether it's English stuff, like the Smiths or New Order; American bands, like Sonic Youth and Smashing Pumpkins; or more international things, like Björk.

TONG: One thing that's worked in our favor is that we've never really been openly parochial about what we do and never made a big deal about who we are. [That said], we were thinking of calling the second album *Winston Churchill*.

OKEREKE: [Or] *Post-War Britain*.

MOAKES: I have met at least one person who was surprised that we were English. Of course, that's one person in a lot of people. That's an achievement for us, because we didn't start the band to be an extension of our nationality. There are a lot of bands that are successful in England based on their nationality. Robbie Williams is huge in the U.K. What he does is very English, and English people love it.

Were you aware of the buzz Bloc Party was receiving on blogs the first time around?

OKEREKE: Not really. It doesn't seem like it's as big a deal in the U.K. People have Web diaries, but it's not as big a phenomenon. An American band can come over and play a big venue without having anything out. Panic! At the Disco played four nights at Brixton, which is huge, but their record hasn't sold a lot of copies in the U.K. People are just excited

about seeing a new band from across the pond.

MOAKES: I think we got more [online hype] in the U.K. Especially on our own message boards and in our forums, they buzz like bees. They get a snippet of a bootleg, and they just pore over every word of it. With us, a lot of the lyrics change right up until the last minute, and even after they're recorded. There are kids who are poring over lyrics that have been changed or binned and left behind entirely. But

"You rarely see huge bands make interesting music."

KELE OKEREKE

they've got live versions of songs we did six months ago. I can understand why—they want to get as much meaning out of it as possible—but the context has changed. Nowadays, it's recorded one night, it's on the Internet the next, and before you know it, it's gotten around the whole community and everybody's got an opinion about it.

Making *A Weekend in the City*, did you worry about the dreaded sophomore slump?

OKEREKE: There are lots of bands that have made a [second] record that's safe, that has less drama and less excitement. How many of the bands in the last five years who had a modicum of success with their first record went on to make a disappointing second record? A lot.

TONG: I don't think many bands think about that. Whenever you make a record, you have one chance to get it right. I think the more you worry about making mistakes, the less you trust the record.

MOAKES: We've heard so much about it that it

doesn't mean anything anymore. Now that we've finished the record, there's not much we can do about it. We're thinking about what comes next.

The new songs sound huge. Is this your bid for arena-rock stardom?

MOAKES: I knew when we were writing that we didn't want to have the same angular guitar sounds [as *Silent Alarm*]. In the year after it came out, a lot of bands started doing that new-wave thing and it was becoming tired. When we were gigging before recording *Silent Alarm*, we didn't play with bands like that. The bands we were playing with were still doing garage rock from the year before. So we never felt connected to the bands we're associated with.

OKEREKE: Some of the songs have a large sound, but we never really intended to just make things sound bigger. You make music for people to like it. You very rarely see huge bands make interesting music. To be a big band, you have to go with the lowest common denominator. I think [popular bands] can still be interesting, like Queen. That wasn't a hands-in-the-air, Nickelback kind of thing. It wasn't an empty gesture.

MOAKES: I don't know that we designed any of the songs to be played in arenas. I think part of that is in the instrumentation. I think Broken Social Scene also make that kind of music, even though they're not playing arenas. They're epic in a very tangible way. So we've definitely widened the sound in that sense.

The first line on the new album is "I am trying to be heroic." The other lyrics are very dark, but there are glimpses of hopefulness. What perspective were you writing from?

OKEREKE: The thing about this record is it's not just my story all the way through. It's a lot of different perspectives from different walks of life. I wanted to capture the feeling of a city with lots of different stories, with everyone walking around and trapped in their own concerns. The perspective in "Hunting for Witches" for that protagonist is different from the protagonist in "SRXT." We wanted to try to capture this idea of a living, breathing city, and not have it be clouded by one person's view.

TONG: I did talk to Kele just before recording, and I said I wanted this record to be about the city.

OKEREKE: And he was denied.

TONG: Then he did it anyway. Sort of like when Murtley has an idea for Dick Dastardly. I think there is this unspoken, implicit agreement that anything Kele says, he represents us in some way. I don't think we'll get in a situation there where he'll say a

load of stuff and we'd be uncomfortable with it.

OKEREKE: What if I said I was bigger than Jesus?

What happened on the aborted Panic! At the Disco tour? [The official reason cited was Tong's collapsed lung.]

OKEREKE: I hadn't really heard Panic! At the Disco's music before, to be honest.

MOAKES: I'd be lying if we didn't debate going on tour with them. The timing was the best thing about it, because the record was ready, and we were ready to start playing it. The benefits were a really big audience and young fans.

OKEREKE: We knew the sort of fans they had, and we knew it would be a challenge. I thought they were going to have a gothic teenage fan base. There were lots of really young kids, really young girls. We didn't have much experience with that. But it's a shame we didn't get a chance to finish it. The band seemed like very nice people.

TONG: You're giving the politically correct version of what went down. I'm sure if Panic! read this, they probably wouldn't be offended if we said we'd probably misjudged their fans.

OKEREKE: Bear in mind we only played three shows.

TONG: And in one of those I only had one lung.

There's a lot of pressure nowadays to not only be a band but also a brand. Do you have any aspirations to start a clothing line or a record label?

TONG: I'm uncomfortable with the idea of making music as a run-up to something bigger.

OKEREKE: Pete Wentz style?

TONG: [Fall Out Boy have] got action figures, and it's not an ironic thing.

OKEREKE: Marilyn Manson has got action figures.

TONG: But he's cool.

OKEREKE: We should do the Bloc Party Book Club.

TONG: We need to get kids reading again. No joke, that actually would be a good idea.

OKEREKE: I saw an interview with some [pop star] where she said, "I'm not that into music, I'm a model, and I'm just doing music to expand my empire."

TONG: When you do that and create these companies to sell things to teenagers, it's sort of the antithesis of rock'n'roll. Not to be too punk rock about things, but if you're out to be a musician, you should concentrate on music.

OKEREKE: I guess it's different growing up in the States than it is in the U.K. In the U.K. you're taught that sort of careerist mind-set is really dishonorable. I think that that kind of entrepreneurial attitude is a bit shameful. But Americans have the American dream. The way you view self-made aspirations is way different than it is in the U.K.

So are there any particular goals or milestones you'd like to hit with *A Weekend in the City*?

MOAKES: We just want people to love the new album. We want people to want to hear those songs when we play [gigs]. It's our newborn baby, so we want it to grow up in a nice environment.

LISSACK: [Finally piping up] I concur.

TONG: I want a handjob from Courtney Love. Quote Matt from Bloc Party, married ten months. ☿

CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH

IS THERE A BLOGGER OUT THERE WHO DOESN'T HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT Clap Your Hands Say Yeah? Since 2005, the staunchly indie group have racked up raves for Philadelphia-based singer Alec Ounsworth, whose David Byrne-like yelp lingers over abstract metaphors, and his Brooklyn bandmates—bassist Tyler Sargent, drummer Sean Greenhalgh, and guitarists/keyboardists Robbie Guertin and Lee Sargent—who accent their art rock with toys, bells, and tambourines. When word of mouth helped sell 270,000 copies of their debut worldwide, everyone talked about this DIY success story. By the time CYHSY finished *Some Loud Thunder*, the follow-up they self-release on February 1, expectations were running high. So was the potential for backlash. **MELISSA MAERZ** →

THE STATE OF MUSIC



**"With our
music, you
have to sit
down and
really listen."**

ALEC COUNSWORTH



Clap Your Hands Say Yeah

Photographed in New York City,
December 7, 2006

FROM LEFT On Lee Sargent: Barneys sweater, Levi's jeans, Adidas sneakers. On Sean Greenhalgh: A.P.C. sweater, Levi's jeans. On Robbie Guertin: Marc Ecko jeans. On Alec Dunsworth: Levi's shirt and jeans. On Tyler Sargent: Benetton shirt, Diesel jeans, Converse sneakers. For details, see Where to Buy.

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah (CONT'D)

The first line of the new album is "All this talking, you'd think I'd have something to say." Are you refuting the idea that, because your first album was so hyped, you need to make some kind of grand statement with this second one?

OUNSWORTH: That line has more to do with the suggestion that there's going to be a backlash against us and that it becomes mundane to keep talking about this whole hype/backlash discussion. People start to lose the point. In my opinion, people should be approaching this album as if it were our first—or our third or our eighth.

That's a difficult thing to do these days, since there's so much emphasis, especially online, on breaking new bands. How difficult is it to sustain your initial buzz on a second album?

GREENHALGH: We leaked three MP3s on our website yesterday. I think that's a good way of letting people hear it before blogs tell them what to think of it.

OUNSWORTH: There are certain accelerated aspects of this peculiar environment that don't work to serve the best interests of musicians. The speed at which people pass judgment has accelerated to keep up with the technology—it's like you need to form an opinion in ten seconds. That's the deadening of one's soul in response to art or music. Some bands react against that with the only thing they can: the idea that you need to shock someone to make them pay attention.

Is shock value effective in the long term?

OUNSWORTH: Well, the Velvet Underground shocked people so much that nobody bought any of their albums, but they're still important today. When Bob Dylan went electric, people were shocked. But your audience makes up what "shocking" is—it's not shocking if it makes sense to you. If you're going to paint your face and go out with underwear over your head, it's gotta mean something.

With MySpace and YouTube, bands can get their songs out to the public more easily, but they also have far more competition. Overall, do you think those sites hurt or help bands like yours?

GUERTIN: Well, they make it easy to contact fans. It's like an online business card for bands.

T. SARGENT: But MySpace is so saturated with bands, I don't even know how to go about finding good music.

OUNSWORTH: There's a certain devaluation to musical projects by virtue of the fact that, with one click, you're listening to a different band. This is why I tell people the only way to approach our

music is by building a relationship with it. You can't just have these trailing ten-second conversations. You have to sit down and really listen.

Do you think it's important that people listen to your album as a cohesive work rather than enjoying individual songs?

OUNSWORTH: Yeah. Songs have become more of a product as opposed to an experience. But then, that's the negative side. The good side is that they give you a little understanding of what a band might be doing, and you can decide if you want more. It's like tasting wine so that you can decide if you want to order the bottle—

T. SARGENT: And then you taste the whole wine list. And then you black out. [Laughs]

"I'm very determined to get things to come out the way I like."

ALEC OUNSWORTH



OUNSWORTH: And then you don't have to buy anything at all. And everything starts tasting really, really good.

A lot of new bands get popular online before they have time to develop their live shows. Backlash seems to be a direct result of that disconnect: People who love the album get disappointed by the tour.

OUNSWORTH: It's funny because when we started off playing, people were like, "Why doesn't the album sound like the live shows?" Then later everyone was asking, "Why don't the live shows sound like the album?"

How are your live shows different from the album? **L. SARGENT:** The shows are a little...rough around the edges. Sometimes you get stuff thrown at you—that doesn't happen on the album.

What do people throw at you?

L. SARGENT: Well, in Mexico City it was lipstick, a chair, a shoe...

GREENHALGH: The shoe hit the kick drum. There were glow sticks whizzing past my head the whole time because we lost our monitors during the second song and—

L. SARGENT: And we sucked. In front of, like, 15,000 people.

GREENHALGH: This was our most recent show. It will go down in the books as the worst experience ever.

You haven't signed to a label yet, but you've said you aren't ruling out that option. What would it take for that to happen?

GREENHALGH: It's not really a question of labels anymore. All we need is distribution. [Our distributor] ADA can get our albums into any store if there's a demand for it. Then you don't even get into discussions of "indie" versus "major."

GUERTIN: When we were talking to labels the first time, we asked, "What can you do for us that we can't do for ourselves?" Maybe if someone came up with a good answer, we'd sign. But no one has yet.

What about fronting you a lot of money?

OUNSWORTH: Working with a lot of money is almost as much of a creative limitation as working with very little. John Cage discovered the prepared piano [a piano that's converted into a percussive instrument by placing objects on or between the strings, hammers, or dampers] because he was supposed to have a percussion ensemble in a space where there wasn't enough room, so he had to convert his piano into a prepared piano to cover the percussive parts. It's those types of innovations that I admire. You could have millions of dollars, but million-dollar shit is still shit.

Alec, you reference a lot of poets on this album: Rimbaud, Robert Frost, John Berryman. How does their work figure into yours?

OUNSWORTH: I love John Berryman. I heard he killed himself by jumping off a bridge and waving to everyone on the way down. What comes off to me in some of Berryman's work is that there's a certain sense of desperation in any artist who is trying to do something honest. The idea behind all of this—the same idea behind the name Clap Your Hands Say Yeah—is to balance out what is serious with what is not serious, to take life not seriously at all and utterly seriously at the same time. You'll drive yourself crazy if you don't find that balance,

and it has always been tough for me to find that middle ground.

That's interesting because the album's last song, "Five Easy Pieces," seems to be about your struggle to determine whether you still take this process seriously, whether making art is still meaningful to you. And the final line is "Give up, give up, give up, give up." That's a pretty bleak way to end the album.

OUNSWORTH: Everybody goes through times where they're not content with anything. To me, it's the illusion of happiness that causes discontent.

What makes you unhappy about being in a band?

OUNSWORTH: Moving around so much. Going out on the road is totally exhausting. I've been working on this children's album because some years ago I got really sick, and I decided it would be a good idea to stay home and work on the piano; and it just turned out that the songs I was working on had a childlike attitude. Then I remembered that I used to get sick on my birthday every year because I've never been good with people paying attention to me. I understand why I have to go out on the road, and I appreciate everyone for coming out to see us, but I just get uncomfortable.

You'd rather write music by yourself?

OUNSWORTH: Absolutely. And everybody else knows that.

I've heard that you aren't often in the studio at the same time as your bandmates.

OUNSWORTH: I'm very determined to get things to come out the way I like them, and I have a pretty good idea of how to make that happen, so not everyone needs to be in the studio at the same time. I do a lot of it: I write the skeleton of the song, the guys figure out parts for their primary instruments, and they try those parts out, and I'll make a decision as to whether those parts stay. Everyone is free to bring ideas, but everyone understands that I'm the one who makes the final decision.

So Clap Your Hands Say Yeah is not a democracy.

OUNSWORTH: No. But I pick people to work with by virtue of the fact that they have certain strengths—and I can't play every instrument myself. It's a tricky thing to talk about. If I'm honest, I might be insulting without meaning to be. Everybody's contribution is very worthy of credit, but we don't function like a lot of other bands.

In your mind, what would be a sign that Clap Your Hands Say Yeah has "made it"?

OUNSWORTH: Well, we made the first album with no money and nobody saying we were good. We made it for \$10,000. Even if I don't like this album, I'm sure we could get that money together again to make another one. What makes me think I wouldn't be happier giving up the road to work a day job and record on my own? Completing albums the way I see fit—that's the only version of success I know. ☛

KAISER CHIEFS

SECOND ALBUMS ARE NOTORIOUSLY CURSED AFFAIRS. MANY BANDS emerge from the studio with harrowing tales of crushing pressure and bitter conflict over track selection. Kaiser Chiefs are not one of those bands. "We just did it," says ebullient singer Ricky Wilson of their still-untitled sophomore disc, "Easy." * Kaiser Chiefs' golden streak is all the sweeter because they've previously tasted failure. As post-Strokes garage-rockers Parva, the five Yorkshiremen—Wilson, drummer Nick Hodgson, guitarist Andrew "Whitey" White, bassist Simon Rix, and keyboardist Nick "Peanut" Baines—were dropped from their label before their first album could be released. So they licked their wounds and reinvented themselves. * Less than three years later, Kaiser Chiefs have sold 2.8 million copies of their fizzy 2005 debut, *Employment*, and picked up some unexpected boosters. "Jay-Z invited us to his party in London," says Hodgson, folding his pole-thin frame onto a studio sofa in West London. "And Jon Bon Jovi likes 'I Predict a Riot.'" No wonder, then, that the only new song to address their recent good fortune is called "Thank You Very Much," partly inspired by an encounter with a crowd surfer. "As he came over the top, I caught hands with him," says Wilson. "I remember thinking, 'He's going to remember that for the rest of his life. And I'm just a cock in a band.'" **DORIAN LYNSEY**

What's the best thing about being successful after trying for so long?

WILSON: Nowadays we can actually tell people to fuck off. You don't have to do everything. When we first started out, we were like whores. We'd do anything.

Anything you regret?

WILSON: Most of the stuff we've done I look back and laugh at. We went on [British TV variety show] *Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway*, and at the end we had to do a "wave out," which is standing on a stage waving like this. [Grins stupidly] And I was between [TV chef] Ainsley Harriott and [ex-Spice Girl] Emma Bunton. I think that's hilarious.

Have you gotten used to the spoils of success?


HODGSON: No. We travel on [budget airline]

easyJet, and we get average hotels. Our tour manager told me the other day that he deliberately didn't turn us into children. And because of that, because we're from Yorkshire, because we're friends, we haven't become knobheads.

On your debut, you wrote "Oh My God" and "Modern Way" about your struggle to be recognized. Is it harder to write about doing well?

WILSON: We didn't want to write a second record about being pop stars and traveling the world. **HODGSON:** Songs aren't blogs. They don't have to be descriptions of what's been happening. It could be a load of old nonsense. Look at Pink Floyd. It doesn't all make sense, does it?

Because of Parva, *Employment* was your make-and-break record, so is this the first-ever second album to have less pressure than the debut? →



Kaiser Chiefs

Photographed in London,
December 11, 2006

FROM LEFT On **Nick Baines**: Puma sneakers. On **Nick Hodgson**: Modern Amusement polo shirt, Filippa & pants, Le Coq Sportif sneakers. On **Andrew White**: Belstaff coat, Levi's jeans. On **Ricky Wilson**: Aquascutum coat, Rag & Bone jacket, Nudie jeans, Converse sneakers. On **Simon Riat**: Full Circle jacket, Nudie jeans, Dassler sneakers. For details, see *Where to Buy*.

Kaiser Chiefs (CONT'D)

HODGSON: Yes!

WILSON: Nobody was forcing us at gunpoint to make a second record. Because we were savvy and signed to a small label [B-Unique in the U.K.]—well, I say savvy, but it was because nobody else would sign us—we said in January (2006) we were going into the rehearsal studio to write an album, and they said, "Great. Give us a call when it's done." And that's what we did.

HODGSON: I wrote a little bit on tour. It's easy if the singer is also the guitarist and the songwriter, because he just goes, "Hey, guys, follow me!" and starts singing it. You can't do that if you're on the drums.

WILSON: But then again, because everyone's involved, there's no one being the dictator. With a singer/guitarist/songwriter, you're not going to go, "I don't really like that verse. It's a bit shit. Have you got another one?" Because he'll go, "No, I like that one and I'm the leader of the band."

None of these new songs have that trademark Kaiser Chiefs bit where you build up to the chorus by singing ohhhh. Did you institute a ban on ohhhh?

HODGSON: We didn't want to have any ohhhhs because they're the bane of our lives. We got rid of all of the gimmicks. Gimmicks are what you do when you're a support band and you want to be massive.

WILSON: Being an unknown support band is one of the hardest jobs in the world, because no one really gives a shit. You're the soundtrack to buying beer.

Are you still trying to win people over, or are big, catchy choruses just what you enjoy writing?

HODGSON: That's what we like. When Simon Rix grumbles about some chorus, I have to go, "Right, see you tomorrow. Come back. It'll be better." If you crack Simon, you've cracked it. Everyone in our band likes big choruses.

WILSON: We love playing hits.

HODGSON: It's boring people who play boring music.

WILSON: And we're not boring people.

With two years of tours and festival dates, it seems like you've hardly been away since the last album. Is it crucial to maintain that kind of momentum?

HODGSON: Well, the Beatles toured constantly from '62 to '66. They just didn't have e-mail, and

people didn't write on forums about this and that. So the only people who knew were the people in that city.

WILSON: We tried to disappear at the beginning of the year, but it was impossible. You can't stop the radio from playing your songs. We actually did want to get out of people's hair a bit, in the U.K. especially.

HODGSON: We definitely achieved it in America.

WILSON: [Deadpan] Yeah. We wanted to lay low in America. Not be everywhere. Green Day need a chance, don't they?

So many Britpop hopefuls have shriveled from neglect in the U.S. What does it take to succeed there?

WILSON: Having a song at the end of *The OC*. We've had songs on *The OC*, but we've never appeared on it, like, y'know, in a bar.

HODGSON: U2 had it in mind that they were going to break America, and I think they probably stayed there for nine months, touring constantly. Good for them.

"Maybe the Killers will fall apart because they want it too much."

NICK HODGSON

Do you care enough to do that?

WILSON: We do care about America, but we care about the world more. And also we care about our own sanity and people we like seeing.

HODGSON: You can't care about one country enough to spend nine months there and forget about the rest of them. If someone said you had to spend nine months in the Far East, you'd say no.

WILSON: Or Antarctica. "Have you cracked the South Pole yet?" I got put off in America. Someone said when we were last there, "Have I heard of your band? Have you got a video out?" It used to be, "Have you got a song on the radio?" It's weird. But, y'know, we live in a visual age, and that's why we're all so handsome.

HODGSON: We were in Cleveland and got in a taxi, and the guy goes, "What are you doing?" And we told him we were supporting the Foo Fighters. And he said, "The Foo Fighters?" So if the Foo Fighters are getting that reaction in the town where they're playing to 40,000 people, what are we going to get?

Do you think the prevalence of blogs and message boards makes life easier for a new band?

WILSON: Yes. Bands have been coming through a lot more in the last few years.

HODGSON: People are still signing really massive record deals, though, and I don't think they should.

WILSON: I think there should be a law passed that no record deal should be over £100,000 [\$200,000]. We paid [our advance] back in the first week. [Grips] Not in America, though.

Is it a good time for music?

HODGSON: I always think about the Clash and how good they were. Look at the Libertines, right? If they were any good, they'd still be together and they'd be doing something progressive, but they're not, and they never were. They say that they're influenced by the Clash and they just sounded like the Clash. A bit. There's a thousand bands in Britain that are inspired by the Libertines, but they're uninspiring. So music's not as good, but there's more of it.

One of your new songs is called "Everything's Average Nowadays." Is that a fair reflection of how you feel?

HODGSON: Yeah, it is. There's interesting things happening in the underground, but when you turn the telly on and see the latest celebrity-doing-something-out-of-the-ordinary program or the latest pop-star program, it kind of gets you down.

But you're still interested in the mainstream rather than the underground.

HODGSON: We're doing it for the masses, but we're doing it with indie roots. It's a good struggle, because it keeps it interesting. We're interested in having songs on the radio and having massive amounts of fans, but we also hate the mainstream. But we wouldn't be underground, because we wouldn't feel happy about not fulfilling our potential as song-makers. You can only be underground if you're a bit shit.

Really? So would you say that the Velvet Underground were a bit shit?

HODGSON: Absolutely. They're the ultimate "a bit shit" band.

How far do your ambitions extend?

HODGSON: You just think about the year ahead. I don't know. We'll see. I don't want to be U2-size. It makes me feel claustrophobic if I imagine that our band would ever be as big as U2.

That's what the Killers want.

HODGSON: They'll never do it, though, and I think we probably will because we don't want it as much. [Laughs] We always wanted to be as big as the Charlatans and sell 2,000 tickets at gigs. We thought that would be unachievable and amazing. So maybe the Killers will fall apart because they want it too much.

So, is not caring too much the secret to staying sane?

HODGSON: We're completely convinced we've done the best album we can, and we want to do all the press and all the gigs because it deserves it. But there was a point when we hadn't written any of these songs, when we thought, "If it finished tomorrow, we could honestly say we've surpassed every ambition we've ever had. Everything else is a bonus. It doesn't matter." It's a great place to be. It's like when someone says you've got six months to live and that was two years ago. ☘

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THE STATE OF MUSIC

THE SHINS





By Robert Levine
Photographs by
Tom Fowlks

BIG ADVENTURE

Since breaking out in *Garden State*, the quirky indie poppers have been on a roller-coaster ride they never imagined. With the release of their new album, will Sub Pop's biggest gamble pay off?

Photographed at Oaks Amusement Park, Portland, Oregon, December 3, 2006

FROM LEFT On Jesse Sandoval:

DKNY suit, H&M shirt, Ben Sherman tie, Marc Jacobs shoes. On James Mercer: Gucci suit, Dior Homme by Hedi Slimane shirt, Valentino tie, H&M socks, Lacoste shoes. On Dave Hernandez: Ted Baker suit, J. Lindeberg shirt, Tom Browne tie, Converse sneakers. On Martin Crandall: Nerc by Marc Jacobs, Calvin Klein shirt, Valentino bow tie, Ben Sherman pants, PF Flyers sneakers. For details, see *Where to Buy*.

"I took this chaos in my life, chopped it up, and made songs."

JAMES MERCER



The Shins, photographed at Portland's Crystal Ballroom, December 13, 2006

Nobody watching *Garden State* that night in September 2004 at Portland, Oregon's Lloyd Center Cinema noticed the slight, bearded man seated in the back with his girlfriend. A curious music fan with a keen eye might have identified him as James Mercer of the Shins, the jangly indie-rock band whose song "New Slang" figures prominently in one of the movie's pivotal moments. But Mercer, who was seeing the film for the first time, was relieved no one did. "I slumped down in my seat," he remembers. "I felt exposed."

Soft-spoken and self-effacing, Mercer goes out of his way to avoid attention. As a teenager, he says, he was so shy he'd hide in the closet when strangers came to the door. It wasn't until his mid-20s that he came out of his shell.

Now, at 36, he's relaxing on a leather chair in a lounge at a trendy New York City hotel, sipping a scotch and soda and talking about the Shins' third album, *Winning the Night Away*. Mercer writes and sings all of the Shins' songs, so he's become accustomed to doing interviews. But onstage he stands to the side of keyboardist and class clown Martin Crandall, who does most of the talking. "He loves it and he's good at it," says Mercer. "And I can look to those guys for comfort."

Until two and a half years ago, the Shins' audience wasn't all that big anyway, although Mercer's cryptic lyrics and fragmented melodies had made the band famous to a few. That changed with *Garden State*, the whimsical yet emotionally potent comedy-drama directed by Zach Braff. In one of the film's early scenes, Natalie Portman's oddball-with-a-heart-of-gold tells Braff's disaffected antihero that a Shins song "will change your life."

And that changed everything for Mercer, Crandall, drummer Jesse Sandoval, and bassist Dave Hernandez.

Thanks to the unexpected exposure, the Shins' two albums went on to sell more than twice what they had before the movie's release. The first, 2001's *Oh,*

Inverted World (which includes "New Slang"), has sold almost 500,000 copies in the U.S., and 2003's *Chutes Too Narrow* has passed the 400,000 mark. Almost overnight, the Shins became indie-rock icons, plus established enough that everyone knew they were cool.

Even before the *Garden State* blossoming, the Shins had revitalized their legendary label, Seattle's Sub Pop Records, which had stumbled after its grunge-filled glory years of the late '80s and early '90s, when Nirvana and Mudhoney made their first rumblings there. "When *Inverted World* came out, it was a renaissance," says Sub Pop cofounder and president Jonathan Poneman. Aside from Nirvana's debut album, *Bleach*, and the Postal Service's *Give Up*, the two Shins albums have become the best-selling releases in the label's history. With the addition of acts like Hot Hot Heat and Iron & Wine, Sub Pop is once again thriving, both commercially and creatively.

Anticipation for a new Shins album has been building for more than a year. *Winning the Night Away*, once set for last summer, slid to the fall before its January 23 release was confirmed. "I think I'm not very good at estimating how long it will take me to work on a project," Mercer says. "I needed a lot of time to figure out what the fuck to write about."

Mercer had plenty of emotional material to work with, little of it uplifting. In 2003 he went through a painful breakup. "I made mistakes," he says. "And it ended up that we just don't talk."

More trouble followed. A home Mercer bought in Portland in 2002 turned out to be adjacent to a crack house, and when police raided his neighbors, the dealers assumed Mercer had fingered them. They threatened him, broke into his place, and stole the master tapes for *Inverted World*. "That was very difficult," he says with typical understatement. "I had to move out of that situation."

The Shins' success also altered his relationships with some old friends, as the one-time wallflower suddenly became Mr. Popular, whether he liked it or not. "My whole social status was elevated from someone who was low on the totem

"Someone with my personality tends to ponder the whole nature of love." JAMES MERCER

inspired the *Winning* track "Australia") and ultimately joined the Superchunk-influenced Flake, which included every future Shin but Hernandez. In 1997 he started the Shins as a side project with Sandoval, then brought in Crandall after Flake broke up. Poneman signed the band in 2000 after seeing them perform in San Francisco. "There were these great songs," he says, "this sense of intimacy, this exquisite pop music coming from a place you wouldn't expect."

Two nights before I interview Mercer, the Shins are headlining Sub Pop's showcase at the CMJ Music Marathon, an annual entertainment industry conference in New York. The crowd applauds the band's yet-to-be-released songs enthusiastically, in part because they're familiar. An early copy of *Winning* has found its way onto the Internet, much to Sub Pop's chagrin. "This is the leak release party," Crandall jokes from the stage.

It's hardly surprising that *Winning* has been eagerly awaited by college radio DJs, who tend to favor the kind of elliptical lyrics and fragmented melodies the Shins have perfected. What's interesting, though, is how popular the Shins have become outside the cloistered world of indie rock.

While the first two Shins albums found their audience gradually, for *Winning the Night Away*, Sub Pop is thinking bigger: The label is shipping between 200,000 and 250,000 copies, more than five times it has for any other release. It also shelled out for a relatively big-budget video for "Phantom Limb," and Mercer has just returned from a two-week promo stint in Europe. Five years ago the label could not have done any of that, Poneman says.

When it was founded in 1988, Sub Pop epitomized the artist-friendly and indie-minded labels that sprouted in alt rock's heyday. The label became identified with grunge, but it released many other strong albums, including the Afghan Whigs' *Congregation*, Sunny Day Real Estate's *Diary*, and *The Sacrilegious Sounds of the Supersuckers*. In 1995, when the label's cachet had peaked, Poneman and cofounder, Bruce Pavitt, sold 49 percent of the company to the Warner Music Group. They hoped to expand. But Pavitt soon left, and with corporate budgets came corporate problems—overstaffing, turf wars, and, eventually, debt.

Energized by the success of *Invented World*, the present incarnation of Sub Pop, Poneman says, "grew up with the Shins." The band's unexpected success brought in revenue, of course, but it also helped the label get back its focus. As it did in the pre-Warner days, Sub Pop once again budgets for lean times and, according to Poneman, can break even selling fewer than 10,000 copies of a release—a fraction of what a major label would need. For years, majors had a virtual lock on commercial radio and an efficient distribution system most indies couldn't match. But radio isn't nearly as important for alt-rock albums, and the Alternative Distribution Alliance (ADA), a company 95 percent-owned by Warner Music—Sub Pop owns the other 5 percent—has become expert at getting indie albums into big stores. And Sub Pop can put songs on MySpace as easily as Sony. "Before, you had to get on the radio, and that was closed to us," says Tony Kiewel, Sub Pop's head of A&R. "We're a business that relies on word of mouth, and word of mouth just got a lot bigger on the Web."

"*Winning* is a record we know will sell reasonably well, and it could take off," says Mike Dreese, CEO at Newbury Comics, a small chain of New England music stores. "The band has a much deeper and more developed fan base." A January appearance on *Saturday Night Live* will only boost the Shins' profile.

Mercer is eager, and perhaps a little nervous, to hear how *Winning* will be received. "I have so much invested in this record," he says.

As he has learned, more success often brings more pressure. When Mercer—who is now married, with a baby on the way—found himself becoming something of a star, he says, "It messed with me because I was suddenly getting sexual attention—from people I had known for a long time." To most male musicians, this is a good thing, if not the reason they picked up an instrument in the first place. "But someone with my personality tends to ponder the reasons and the whole nature of love. We have this thing, you should love someone for who they are—who they really are—but who am I? who are you? who am I supposed to be? who do you think I am? and why didn't you think I was that ten years ago?"

He sighs. "I wish I didn't wonder about shit so much."

A few nights later the Shins attend the Xbox party, which attracts an odd mix of game geeks and celebrities to a club on the Bowery, blocks from where CBGB birthed the punk revolution. Here, *Dance Dance Revolution* is more like it. Crandall and Sandoval lose themselves in *Gears of War*, as Mercer and Hernandez sample the bar's top-shelf tequila. When an Xbox executive walks by, the Shins introduce themselves, compliment him on some games, and generally act the way polite music fans probably act around them. He seems slightly bemused that a popular rock band is so excited to meet him.

As the party winds down, Crandall and Sandoval retreat to a corner to squeeze in a few more rounds with the hard-core gamers. And Mercer heads off to another party with Hernandez, looking, tonight at least, like he isn't shy at all. ☺



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He played a Ninja Turtle and helped *The Brady Bunch* jump the shark. Now this former child star has made it his life's work to bring respect to the music he loves. Here's the story of a man named Robbie...

BY NANCY MILLER * ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID BRINLEY



Who in here likes air hockey?" It's nearly midnight on this sticky summer evening in Hollywood, where swarms of Killers wannabes sporting neckties and asymmetrical haircuts are get into the packed clubs along Sunset Strip. A few blocks down from the Viper Room, the Roxy, and the Rainbow is the Cat Club, a tiny dive owned by Stray Cats drummer Slim Jim Phantom. Unfortunately, the only buzz in this place tonight is coming from the beer fridge behind the bar. * Onstage, the skinny frontman of a band called the Drills repeats the question to the 20 or so in the bar. "I said, Who likes air hockey?" he squawks, mustering up some swagger. "Cause, uh, this song is about muthafuckin' air hockey!" A few claps and some half-hearted woos ricochet around the near-empty room before the band rips into its ode to the tabletop game.

Welcome to the ninth annual International Pop Overthrow. This evening marks day five of Los Angeles' 18-day festival, spread out over nine venues around town. At IPO there are no A&R reps cruising for the Next Big Thing. No bloggers snapping photos with their cell phones. No hotties in leotards clamoring to get backstage. There isn't really a backstage. And the only boozies you're likely to see at this sausage party belong to the middle-aged rocker dude in the XL leather vest sans shirt, waiting to do his 20-minute set.

You see, IPO is a music fest celebrating power pop. And power pop—that ringing, often melancholic, always melodic music inspired by the Beatles, the Beach Boys, and the Who (Pete Townshend is credited with coining the term in a 1967 interview), and later the Raspberries, Big Star, and Cheap Trick—is suffering from an image problem. Power pop is not seen as goofy ironic, like yacht rock; that's because the sound is usually earnest, shy, horny, and sweet. And, as fans of the genre will repeatedly tell you, it's totally misunderstood.

"It doesn't behoove a young band who are ambitious and want a career to call themselves power pop," says Bruce Broden, founder of power-pop indie label Not Lame Recordings, a sponsor of International Pop Overthrow (named after an album by Chicago's Material Issue). "It's not a positive term, because distributors and labels have been conditioned to hate it, and therefore, power pop has been dismissed as not commercially viable." (Fountains of Wayne and Weezer are two of the very few successful power-pop acts in the last decade.)

Power pop is even derided by bands purportedly playing it (or are at least categorized as such on Amazon and iTunes). "I think of power pop as a candy-ass version of punk rock with easy-to-digest angst for 12-year-olds," says Damian Kulash of OK Go, who've been treadmill-dancing away from the toxic term. "It's become a catchall phrase for music that's not particularly inventive-sounding."

Power pop's sunken status makes Robbie Rist extremely pissed off. Or maybe that's the third Amstel Light talking. "Power pop is the most marginalized genre of music," he grouches from the back of the Cat Club, getting all fired up for one of many "In a just world..." diatribes he'll launch into over the next several days. "In a just world, bands would just come out and say they're power-pop bands.

Green Day? Guess what? You're a power-pop band. Just because you're wearing eyeliner doesn't make you punk. And what is this emo shit anyway? Why is it cooler to be some snot-nosed, black-glasses-wearing emo crybaby? And metalheads? C'mon, they're just as geeky as we are but with better cars and longer hair. In a just world, we'd get chicks too."

To the small crowd gathered here tonight, including David Bash, IPO's founder and MC, Rist is far from a geek. He's the patron saint of the festival, a multi-instrumentalist superstar who holds the unofficial record of playing in more bands than any other musician—power pop or otherwise—in the L.A. area. He is regarded as a rock savant, able to perform with just about any band—often without hearing their music first, often doing it better than the regular bassist/drummer/guitarist does. At 2003's IPO, he was a ringer in 17 groups, 12 of which he'd never met before. "And that's a conservative estimate," says Bash. "If some Norwegian band arrives in L.A. without their bassist, Rob can meet them in the parking lot and play with them, onstage, perfectly."

But to the vast majority existing outside of this underground scene, like the writers of *The Daily Show* who used him as an punch line last year, the guy playing IPO tour guide in the shredded blue jeans, dog-chewed Chuck Taylors, faded black T-shirt, and wire-rimmed spectacles is Cousin Oliver, the plucky muppet

with the blond bowl cut who was brought in during the sixth season of *The Brady Bunch*, in 1974, to inject some cute into the aging Bunch. Instead, the show was soon canceled, and Rist is most famous for being one of television's premier shark-jumping characters.

"I was on that show for six weeks—it was a summer job," he explains with mild agitation, as he has clearly discussed this subject countless times. "Imagine if something you did one summer when you were just a kid followed you for the rest of your life? That *Cousin Oliver* would be a polarizing character?" He unleashes a raspy laugh, eyes slitted behind the glasses, cherubic face anchored at the chin by spigs of a goatee. "I had a radio station call me out of the blue and congratulate me that I was voted Most Annoying Child Actor." He pauses. "No, wait. I came in second. I don't even remember who the first annoying child actor was, but I remember I stayed on the phone and argued with them why I



The muppet takes Los Angeles: Robbie Rist, photographed at the Joint, August 6, 2006

Photographs by Chris McPherson



Pop Overthrowers

Fest founder David Bash, Dime Box Band's Laura Ann Masura, singers Butch Young and Matt Lee

should be the Most Annoying Child Actor!" He shakes his fist in mock indignation. "That stuff used to bother me, but now I realize people's feelings about my character on *The Brady Bunch* have nothing to do with me. It's about them."

Still, in the post-*Bunch* '70s, Rist developed a jinxed reputation similar to Cousin Oliver's. He went on to play anchorman Ted Baxter's son on what would be the final season of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Not long after, he starred in a Saturday morning sitcom called *Big John, Little John*, which lasted just one season. His sole appearance on *The Early Show* (for a 2002 *Brady Bunch* reunion) happened on the day Bryant Gumbel announced his departure. "Maybe there is something there," Rist muses, then rolls his eyes.

But Rist is not going to let power pop go out like that. After stepping away from IPO for three years ("That last year I played in 17 different bands. What was I going to do after that, set myself on fire?"), he is back to promote the half-dozen groups with whom he's written, recorded, and produced in his nearby studio. "My theory for power pop is, it's time. If there isn't anything new under the sun in the last century, there is even less new under the sun now. Hip-hop is

played out. Nü metal? Done," he says, slamming his bottle on the bar top. "We're in between trends, and whenever we're in between trends, somebody brings up power pop. Between disco and Duran Duran? Power pop. Between heavy metal and Kurt Cobain, you had the Posies and Jellyfish. I've waited ten years for it to come back and I'm not going to stand by and watch it pass me by again. I'm not going to wake up and be 50 and have missed my chance again." Rist is 42.

Friends and fans believe Rist may be power pop's last hope. "He is one of the most talented musicians I've ever worked with," says Steve Barton, the former (you see that word used a lot with these bands) frontman of San Francisco new wavers Translator (who had a hit in 1982 with "Everywhere That I'm Not"). Rist plays drums in Barton's current incarnation, Steve Barton and the Oblivion Click. "It would be tragic and stupid if people only knew him as Cousin Oliver." Rist isn't sure that's possible: "People who discover my music on the Internet or something tend to say, 'I didn't think it was going to be as good as it was. Most records by actors suck.' And I'm like, 'Okay...thanks.'"

"Nostalgia = Death"

...says Robbie Rist. But he did send us these pictures



**ROBBIE RIST'S
ON THE
RIGHT
ROAD**



Clockwise from top left: With David Hartman on *Lucas Tanner* in the mid-'70s; on *Kidd Video* in 1984; in a *Brady Bunch* fan magazine

Robbie Rist will never be the subject of an *E!* *True Hollywood Story* (though he was No. 76 on VH1's *100 Greatest Kid Stars*). His rise to fame wasn't particularly sordid. Unlike, say, Corey Feldman, with whom Rist costarred in the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movies (Rist voiced Michelangelo), he didn't blow his paydays on Ray-Bans and dope. "I remember doing a table reading with Corey for *Ninja Turtles*," Rist says. "And as we were sitting there, he was ticking off every movie that somehow correlated with his first drug experience, like, 'Oh, yeah, that movie. That was the movie where I drank for the first time, and that was the movie I first smoked pot with some camera guy.' And I'm just sitting there thinking, 'Dude, where was your dad?' My parents were really protective of me."

Rist, however, has frittered away his TV fortune (fueled by a successful run in the '80s and '90s doing voice-overs for Japanese anime and Saturday morning shows like *Kidd Video*) on something equally addictive and similarly dead-end: the pursuit of a music career. "My parents wanted me to be an accountant," he says en route to his studio, 45 minutes outside of L.A. and 20 minutes from his hometown of Woodland Hills. "And I'm like, 'Then why did you keep buying me instruments when I was a kid?'"

A peek inside the Boathouse, his dingy, velvet-curvetted-cornucopia/crash pad in Northridge, reveals the evidence. Amps, guitars, drum kits, mics, and cords cover every inch of the converted loft apartment that used to house sailors. Rist actually owns a house and a condo nearby, but these days he typically sleeps on the Boathouse floor, close to his instruments and recording equipment.

As Rist will almost enjoy telling you, he's broke. Just how broke, he won't say, but when he offers to buy a round at a bar one night, he shuffles through several credit cards before handing one over to the bartender and saying warily, "Try that one." He says he's been struggling to make a living in voice-overs for the last five years. Yet Rist is still renowned in the voice-over world. A few years ago he auditioned for a commercial whose script called for a "Robbie Rist-type" (read:



Fast Intentions (clockwise from top left): Rist hams it up while backing Butch Young; Squidido dress to impress...oh, around a dozen onlookers; tonight, the Joint ain't jumpin'

snarky and sarcastic). He didn't get the job. There are days when he can barely afford gas for his beat-up white van and considers it splurging to buy a pair of drumsticks. Dinner this evening was two ears of microwaved corn on the cob.

While we wait for his two bandmates from Nice Guy Eddie, one of four groups he'll be playing with at IPO this year, Rist pours cheap red wine into plastic party cups. "I guess my feeling is, I'd rather go broke doing something I love than make money doing something I hate," he says. "I keep thinking with all of these projects I've got going on, something's got to happen. It's got to." Rist, who says he doesn't watch TV, doesn't boast the same level of integrity with his acting gigs, which have in recent years included an appearance on the reality show *Star Dates*. "I approach acting as a job. Pay me enough money and I will put on that monkey suit and throw poo at the audience."

"Power pop is the stuff romantic mix tapes were made for—even if you never delivered them."

Rist's list of projects, while impressive in its magnitude, varies in its quality. He is involved with more than a dozen bands, including the alt-country Kingsize-maybe and a kiddie-rock combo with author/comedian/talk-show host Greg "He's Just Not That Into You" Behrendt. In 2006, Rist produced his first movie, *Stump the Band*, a low-budget horror flick. It has yet to find a distributor. Rist admits he has a hard time saying no and tends to spread himself thin. "That's a real thing for me, that pleasing behavior," he says. "It comes from being a little kid on set. You do something and people say, 'You're amazing!' You're like,

"That? You liked that? Is that making you happy? What can I do to do that again?"

Rist was the prototypical precocious kid, popping in just about every hit TV show between 1974 and 1984: *The Bionic Woman*, *CHiPs*, *Simon & Simon*, *What's Happening!!* He attended public school, but claims he never developed proper social skills. "I grew up talking to adults on sets," he explains. "I never knew how to hang out with kids and be normal." His father, a violinist, got him a violin at age three and let Rist have whatever instruments he wanted. With a sister who was nine years older and no kids to play with in his suburban neighborhood, he listened to music. (By the end of his freshman year, Rist could follow along with every instrument on Elvis Costello's *This Year's Model*, except keyboard.)

In 1978, when Rist was 14, his piano teacher took him to L.A. nightspot the Troubadour to see the Knack. Just before they hit it big with "My Sharona." "I had this epiphany," he says, "like in *The Blues Brothers*, when the light comes through the stained glass window and [John Belushi's Jake Blues] goes, 'The band.' I suddenly thought, 'I wanna do that.'" From then on, Rist, already well versed in the Beatles, the Kinks, and Costello, began devouring heavier, '60s and '70s power-pop acts and the burgeoning British new wave. "If there was any album with a skinny tie on it, I bought it," he says. "I'd be like, 'Oh, that dude's wearing high-tops? I'll try that album.'"

Rist was particularly uncomfortable around the acid-washed Valley girls at his school, who dismissed little Oliver as just a friend. Power pop, he says, appealed to his adolescent melancholy. "When I was younger, I started getting into these sorts of records because it was an innocent way of expressing to people that you liked them," he says. "Power pop is the stuff romantic mix tapes were made for—even if you never delivered them."

Never married, Rist admits he's still awkward around women. When asked if he has groupies, his eyes bulge in embarrassment. "Oh, ho-ho-no," he stammers. "I am so not that guy." Rist is currently involved with a 23-year-old film-

school grad named Cheyenne, whom he met when she was 16 and he 36. Initially a *Ninja Turtles* fan, Cheyenne reached out after discovering an album by one of his earlier bands and an e-mail courtship ensued. "It was all very innocent," he insists. "I used to help her with her homework and we became friends. And then it, you know, evolved over time." Cheyenne is a striking, petite woman with olive skin, multiple piercings, and a freshly shaved head. "I love him. I'll always love him," she tells me, dreamy-eyed over a cup of green tea while in town visiting Rist during the festival. "No matter what happens, I keep coming back to him, and I'll always keep coming back to him." (Cheyenne plans to move from her native Boston to Los Angeles early this year.) "She's really mature and I'm immature," he explains. "You can hear I'm immature in my music taste. It's Peter Pan music for the boy who doesn't want to grow up."

In the '90s Rist didn't have to. That was when his high school friend Tony Perkins, of cult act Martin Luther Lennon, launched a local monthly party called Bubblegum Crisis. "The L.A. pop scene was an outgrowth of a bunch of bands that were frustrated because the type of music they were into was unpopular in L.A.," says Perkins. "[Bubblegum Crisis] became the place where bands who couldn't get gigs anywhere else could play together and people would actually show up to hear them."

By 1997 a tight-knit group of 20 had exploded onto a scene comprising more than 60 bands, the most prominent being the Negro Problem, Wondermint, Baby Lemonade (who also played as three-fourths of a reconstituted Love), and two of Rist's groups, the Andersons and Wonderboy. Bubblegum Crisis evolved into a biweekly event, and then expanded into an annual power-pop festival called Poptopia. "It really looked like the world was filled with promise, that possibility existed," says Rist. "Still, it's all relative. We used to joke about how you could probably find more people familiar with the elephant-sex scene than with the L.A. power-pop scene. That hasn't changed."

In the midst of this thriving local scene, David Bash, a former marketing director who favors cowboy hats and paisley shirts, decided to organize a second, broader power-pop festival, IPO. "I wanted bands from all over the world to come to L.A. to be able to play in front of people who understood what they were trying to do," he says. "I wanted it to be about the music, not about what you looked like."

But in the past few years, attendance has dwindled. Some say it's because Bash has launched so many IPOs across the country (and one in Liverpool, England), he's diluted the brand. Others say it's just the life cycle of a scene. "Rock'n'roll is a young man's game, unfortunately," says Not Lame's Brodeen. "Bands break up, people move on." Or, more accurately, audiences move on. There were more than 300 bands eager to be a part of IPO's lineup. If only there were that many people willing to pay the \$8 cover charge.

The Joint is adjacent to a Starbucks and is the kind of dive that doesn't have toilet paper or a working lock on the women's bathroom, but charges six bucks for a beer. Not that anyone needs to use the women's bathroom. There are a handful of female acts at IPO, but for the most part, the crowd for every show is nearly identical: pasty white guys between 35 and 50, in Rist's uniform of band T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers.

It's Sunday—Rist's big day. He's got three gigs spread out over the course of eight hours, starting at 1:30 in the afternoon. In this sleepy, predominantly Orthodox Jewish neighborhood, it must sound like a rocking party is going on beyond the heavy doors of the Joint. But inside, IPO is a subdued affair. The bartender eats Chinese takeout, while Adam Marsland, the former frontman of Cockeyed Ghost, huddles in the corner playing cards with his ex-bandmates while a patron dazes in a nearby booth, blissfully oblivious to the high decibels.

Rist scurries in at 1:15, orders a beer, and heads backstage. He is playing with Jeff Caudill, a 35-year-old former punk rocker, now a movie-poster designer. ("I feel like a young pup around here," Caudill says, smiling.) It may be Caudill's band, but as the quintet takes the stage, Rist's child actor reflexes kick in and he hijacks the show before a single note is played. "It's called boredom and a microphone!" Rist hams it up, doing his soundtrack as William Shatner ("Can...you...hear me, Spock?"), then John Fogerty, then Bob Dylan. All of it gets a laugh. "Whatever band's Rob's in," murmurs one audience member, "it becomes Rob's band."

Caudill warms up the room with a twangy alt-country set. Of the dozens of bands that will play over the next ten hours,

the highlights will be Caudill; a San Diego quartet called Squiddo, featuring a 24-year-old badass Milla Jovovich look-alike; and Nice Guy Eddie. The trio's last tune, a quirky cover of Kenny Rogers' "Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)" brings down the half-filled house.

After a round of postshow tequila shots, Nice Guy Eddie drummer Rist, singer/guitarist Chris Jackson, and bassist Missy Buettner whip off their shirts and strike a pose for a roving camera. With a wicked laugh, Buettner tosses her bra toward the horde of guys gathering around her. "I've been playing to see Missy's boobs for ten years," pants one bespectacled admirer. "I'm going to remember this day for the rest of my life."

It's one of the last days of IPO, and Spaceland, arguably the epicenter of L.A.'s alternative-music scene since the early '90s, is packed as Roger Manning, founding member of the legendary Jellyfish, stands onstage, shiny black hair swinging as he pounds out tunes from that band's two albums and some new solo stuff.

But a whole other show is going on at the bar, where an all-star power-pop reunion is in full swing, with Rist at its center. Nipper Sea Turtle, a zaftig blonde who is one of the scene's staples, envelops Rist, smearing sparkly makeup on his cheek. Nearby, Wondermint's Daniel Sahanaja (now with Brian Wilson's band) makes his way through the crowd, while Derrick Anderson (of the Andersons) stops by to say hello. Rist is suddenly, uncharacteristically optimistic. "Power pop is gonna come back. But if it doesn't, then 20 years from now, some 17-year-old is going to find all these bands, all this music, and hit the motherlode. It's gonna be like the Buena Vista Social Club." He pauses, surveying the room. "No, it's gonna be the Buena Vista Antichrist Club." ☼

Robbie's List

His picks for the ten most overlooked power poppers

7 Deadly 5

"Former Tom Waits and current Social Distortion keyboardist Danny McGough, along with guitarist Max Ferguson and bassist Irene Markell, mix pop, punk, roots, and mid-'60s Brill Building sweetness with lyrical weirdness."

Candypanths

"How can Lisa Jenio sound so sweetly innocent and write such naughty songs?"

The Dickies

"Punk my ass! Leonard Phillips writes the best melodies and words this side of Burt Bacharach and Elvis Costello."

The Quik

"Mid-'70s proto-punk new wavers—featuring Danny Wilde [one of the guys responsible for the *Friends* theme]—who are much cooler than anything around today. Makes you wonder where it all went wrong. I blame Peter Frampton."

Trip Shakespeare

"An amazing band from Minneapolis. They eventually morphed into the much more successful—but not nearly as interesting—Semsicon."

The Orion Experience

"Singer/songwriter Orion Simprini started his career in the late '90s with a New York glam-pop band called Kitty in the G. His new album, *Cosmically*, is jaw-droppingly great. Buy it. Trust me."

Cockeyed Ghost

"Adam Marsland is a high-energy cross between Brian Wilson, Paul Stanley, and Elton John. If you don't tear up by the last verse of 'Gimme Ling,' you ain't human."

Martin Luther Lennon

"Tony Perkins is a better writer, singer, and player than anyone from the pop-punk explosion of the late decade."

Nick Gilder

"I'm willing to bet you've only heard 'Hot Child in the City,' but his first three albums are near-perfect pop records with an odd androgynous swagger."

Elton Duck

"They were on Arista, then shelved in the wake of Knacklash. The Bangles' Michael Steele was still his bassist. I hope someone still has the tapes."





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Tomorrow the World

Emo's reigning champs boldly attempt to build a dynasty **BY TREVOR KELLEY**

Fall Out Boy Infinity on High ★★★★★

(SLAND)



Back in 2001, when Fall Out Boy bassist, lyricist, and de facto leader Pete Wentz started playing with a bunch of kids from the suburbs of Chicago, he had no intention of taking over the world. At the time, he probably would've settled for a side stage at Warped Tour. Or a van without transmission problems. Like the thousands of other fledgling punk acts who get together each year out of sheer boredom, Wentz's band seemed destined for the small time: Maybe they'd limp through a U.S. tour, put out a poorly received EP, and

then split up when adulthood finally came calling.

Yet Fall Out Boy have sold 2.5 million copies of their rollicking second album, 2005's *From Under the Cork Tree*, a commercial coup that has spurred a whole slew of side projects for Wentz, including his own record label (Decaydance), clothing line (Clandestine Industries), and social-networking website. In the past six years he has undeniably adopted the mind-set of someone who absolutely wants to take over the world, setting off countless message-board debates in the process. And, as one listen to this ambitious third disc will attest, his wild-eyed determination has rubbed off on his bandmates.

Recorded in part with R&B hitmaker Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds, *Infinity on High* reveals a group that has grown

so confident with success that the members are willing to give in to their every musical whim. It's the first Fall Out Boy record in which singer Patrick Stump fully utilizes his vocal range, and on the funky first single, "This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race," he wails like a shirtless soul singer. The band's brawny

Jay-Z's presence at the onset of *Infinity* feels rather prophetic.

emo riffs and sugary hooks are still evident on songs like "Hum Hallelujah," but Wentz and Co. have beefed up their sound considerably, employing horns, strings, a choir, and, on the blistering opener, "Thriller," a boastful intro from Def Jam prez Jay-Z.

A great deal has been made of Hova's very public support of this band during the past two years, and his startling presence at the onset of *Infinity* feels rather prophetic: After all, Beyoncé's man has always carried himself as an artist who could step to any challenge and, these days, Fall Out Boy have begun to develop a similar swagger. Years ago, this band surely would have balked at the idea of writing an overwrought piano ballad like "Golden" or such a soaring prom-night epic as "I'm Like a Lawyer With the Way I'm Always Trying to Get You Off (Me & You)." Now they don't even flinch. It's that attitude that makes this bravely self-indulgent album so easy to rally behind. Who knows if the four guys will actually conquer the pop universe with these songs, but it'll certainly be fun to watch them try.



Babysambles: Arresting officer not pictured

Aluminium

Aluminium ★½

Imitation can be the most tedious form of flattery. Jack White has already suffered the compliments/indignities of bluegrass and electro tribute albums, so imagine his hidden cringe when the head of his U.K. label decided to give the White Stripes catalog an avant-classical reading. As producers of an orchestra dubbed Aluminium, XL founder Richard Russell and composer Joby Talbot add regal pomp and twisted flourishes to songs that were born from just guitar, voice, and drums, often rendering them unrecognizable. Beyond unnecessary—explaining its limited availability—Aluminium might find a home with diehard Stripes fans and eccentric modern-classical buffs, but very few others. **JOSH MODELL**

Sunshine Anderson

Sunshine at Midnight ★★

MUSIC WORLD
R&B better gets heart stopped on, comes snarling back. Sunshine Anderson has been out of the game since her gritty neo-soul debut went gold in 2003. It's a safe bet she's had some romantic misadventures since then. "Get your lazy ass up off my couch," she howls on "Something I Wanna Give You," the impressively brutal, horn-juiced kiss-off that opens her second album. "Trust" and "My Whole Life" are also punchy R&B anthems of the don't-let-the-door-hit-you-in-the-ass-on-the-way-out variety. A few come-hither moments emerge, but Sunshine is most convincing when she's choosing darkness. **DAVID PEISNER**

The Apples in Stereo

New Magnetic Wonder ★★★★★

SIMIAN/VEP ROC
Indie craftsman stops fiddling, lets melodies shine through

The Apples haven't always made it easy to find their songs' sweet, chewy centers, often obscuring pure pop in unnecessarily dense shells. But on his first album for actor Elijah Wood's new label, chief Apple Robert Schneider gets back to the core—simple, catchy, unabashedly cheery—even while exploring a new musical scale (don't ask) and tinkering with between-song "link-tracks." New Magnetic Wonder (particularly "Can You Feel It?" and the ELO-inspired "Same Old Drag") couldn't be brighter if it had been performed on the sun. **JOSH MODELL**

Babysambles

The Blinding EP ★½

CAPITOL
Tabloid bad boy rebels by showing up, playing music. Between drug busts and court appearances, Pete Doherty somehow found time for this likably messy five-track sequel to his quartet's 2005 debut album. Despite the noisy, over-heated production, which tries to make Babysambles sound like tough guys, or at least Arctic Monkeys, Doherty's slack, go-with-the-flow persona rules (in contrast to the pissed-off vice of Dirty Pretty Things, the other ex-libertines band, led by Carl Barât). If these bleary rockers feel unfinished, at least they're not the flaming disaster that you probably expected. **JOHN YOUNG**

Busdriver

ReadKillOvercoat ★★

ANTI/EPITAPH

Los Angeles MC speaks his maddening mind—at length. Regan "Busdriver" Farquhar embodies everything exhilarating and frustrating about indie-underground hip-hop. He's got a savagely self-aware wit, a gift for free-wheelin' lyrical flights, producer friends who burrow inside his tracks and draw out their mad moods, and the most minimal capacity for anything resembling an accessible hook. Here, on his fifth album, he's more overtly musical, with producers Nobody and Boom Bip incorporating rock, folk, and pop elements. But while 2005's *Fear of a Black Tongue* was a hilarious, merciless evocation of rap hypocrisy from the bottom up, he's now trying to address the wider world. The result: motormouth musings on killing yourself, killing your boss, and "ethereal driftwood." That's why they call it underground. **CHARLES AARON**

Clinic

Visitations ★★½

DOMINO

Indie-rock oddballs refine their mysterious groove

Making virtually the same album four times seems counterintuitive (or even lazy), but maybe these British weirdos—rarely seen without surgical masks—have just been trying to perfect their strange potions with infinitesimal changes. None but diehards will notice, but *Visitations* sounds more alive than anything since 2000's near-classic debut, *Internal Wrangler*, honing all the group's elements: fuzzily distant guitars, Ade Blackburn's half-decipherable rap, a rarely changing thump-thump beat, fleshy dub undertones, and a sense of urgency and mystery that comes from cannily combining all of the above. **JOSH MODELL**

Jill Cunliffe

City Beach ★★½

THE MILITA GROUP

Breezy, low-key tunes from former Beastie confere. On her languid solo debut, Jill Cunliffe suggests we "start the century again at a slower pace." The former Luscious Jackson frontwoman is obviously nostalgic for a time—the

Do your chain hang low, do it wobble to and fro!



She's Crafty

Witty Brit brat calls out the phonies

Lily Allen

Alright, Still ★★

CAPITOL

In "LDN," a breezy reggae-pom jam from her debut album, 21-year-old Lily Allen describes a bike ride through her hometown of London and notes that objects in her mirror are more screwed up than they appear. "When you look with your eyes / Everything seems nice," she chirps. "But if you look twice / You can see it's all lies." That basically sums up the worldview of this well-to-do daughter of British actor Keith Allen: Everyone in England assumes she's traded on her dad's showbiz clout, but Allen actually built a grass-roots buzz the new old-fashioned way—posting demos to her MySpace page.

Alright, Still is all about the stories behind the

stories. In the chorus of "Everything's Just Wonderful," Allen puts on her game face for the tabloids, and then reveals, "I wanna be able to eat spaghetti Bolognese / And not feel bad about it for days and days and days." "Knock 'Em Out" describes the thrill of looking fabulous

Alright, Still is all about the stories behind the stories.

in a bar, then repelling guys with outrageous excuses. In "Not Big," Allen bids a harsh farewell to an ex: "How would you feel if I said that you never made me come?"

Alright's sparkly high-life beats—courtesy of Mark Ronson and Greg Kurstin, among others—are less ambivalent; they all gleam with upmarket panache. But strong medicine always requires a little sugar.

MIKAEL WOOD

mid-'90s, to be exact—when it was somehow possible for a shambling all-girl funk band from New York to have a gold record. This easy-listening mix of Tropicalia- and jazz-inflected pop won't enjoy similar success, but like Coney Island (the rundown Brooklyn beachfront to which the album is dedicated), there's charm in its corniness, notably on "Warm Sound," a pleasant summer ode that could turn a ride on a carousel into a slow-motion reverie. **PHOEBE REILLY**

Dr. Dog

We All Belong ★★½

PARK THE VAN

Ticking the soft underbelly of classic pop rock

A true DIY sleeper, Dr. Dog's *We All Belong* ★★½ 2005 debut was the sort of seemingly innocuous indie album that becomes more knotty and habit-forming with each listen. *We All Belong* is more immediate, and even better: The group's unabashed '70s revivalism remains unchanged—their hometown is Philadelphia, but their heart's in Chicago V—and while singer/songwriters Toby Leaman and Scott McKicken regularly traffic in jaunty piano shuffles ("My Old Ways") and cooing background vocals ("Don't Pretend"), there's an underlying sense of anxiety. *We All Belong* is a perfect example of stoner pop—always warm and fuzzy, yet shaky with paranoia.

BRIAN RAFFERTY

The Drones

Gala Mill ★★

ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES

Growing, guitar-strangling rockers stare down the abyss

Melbourne's the Drones amplify Australia's turbulent musical past by violently wrestling it out of their instruments. Positioned somewhere between Nick Cave and Dirty Three, frontman Gareth Liddiard flips from compassion to contempt, from minimal country to fervent punk. In a grizzled bellow, he tells of cannibalistic convicts ("Words From the Executioner to Alexander Pearce"), and nuclear-age atrocities ("Jezebel"), blending myth and legend with congenial blues. An album's worth of betrayal and bereavement, *Gala Mill* is infused with an outbreak cowboy's refusal to let honor languish with a whimper.

JENNIFER MAERZ

Fiedl Music

Tones of Town ★★½

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Excessively clever second album from slippery Brits

This fresh-faced trio makes pop music for snobs, bending familiar sounds into odd shapes, like an even more fidgety XTC. In less ironic hands, the creamy-sweet voices (shades of Yes or Supertramp) and clean, perky grooves might be a source of mindless comfort, but here, they're unstable elements in a constantly shifting landscape

that induces a sense of gnawing anxiety. For all its obvious wit and fizzy energy, *Tones of Town* ultimately feels self-congratulatory and a bit cold-hearted. **JOHN YOUNG**

The Frames

The Cost ★½

ANTI-

The poor man's U2 slowly descend into melodrama

On their sixth album, these Irish rockers clearly ache to be anthemic rather than adventurous. The result is a tepid effort that bogs down their previously rugged and introspective rock with power-ballad vibrato, lurid over-orchestration, and petulantly vague lyrics. The Cost has been pared of the electronic influences that worked well on 2003's *Burn the Maps*, replacing them with self-indulgent swooning. When singer Glen Hansard hisses, "Dance, monkey, dance / Don't have me repeating myself" (on "The Side You Never Get to See"), you'll need a Guinness to erase the memory of a record with theatrics to spare but nothing to say. **STACEY ANDERSON**

Ginger

Yoni ★★½

RUNDL IMPORT

Another buggy odyssey from a deadlocked wildman

As the flamboyantly mercurial frontman of U.K. pop-metal outfit the Wildhearts, Ginger's no stranger to bombast—

Reissues

The best finds of the month BY WILL HERMES



Neil Young keeps an eye out for the ghost of the '60s.

Neil Young and Crazy Horse

Live at the Fillmore East

March 6 & 7, 1970 ★★

REPRISE

Finally, dude makes good on his promise to empty the vaults. And this is a fine start, recorded back when Crazy Horse was all about Young's crackling jousts with hot-shit guitarist and junk casualty Danny Whitten. The latter's jaunty showcase number about scoring dope ("Come on Baby Let's Go Downtown") is sorta chilling in retrospect. But on the 14-minute "Cowgirl in the Sand," everyone is immortal.

The Doors

Perception ★★

ELEKTRA/RHINO

This is how you (try to) make people buy CDs instead of digitally swiping them: package a band's catalog, plus film clips, on 12 discs in a door-shaped box with a real peephole that, when you hold it up to the light, reveals pictures of the band—just like those old View-Masters at Grandma's! Take that, video iPod!

David Crosby

If I Could Only Remember My Name... ★★½

ATLANTIC/RHINO

This forgotten 1973 solo album is Freak Folk v.1.0—a shimmering, tres loose gathering of San Francisco's original star-children, including Jefferson Airplane, Joni Mitchell, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, and most of the Grateful Dead. Utopia was so close you could feel it.

Cee-Lo

Closet Freak: The Best of Cee-Lo Green the Soul Machine... ★★½

ARISTA/LEGACY

Now that he's a pop star of the magnitude he deserves, it's a

good time to revisit/milk Cee-Lo's back catalog. This single disc cherry-picks from the Garib's Barkley singer's two slept-on solo joints and adds a couple of '80sle Mob classics. When he says he's a "freak" and that his flow is "ridiculous," you best believe him.

Tony Joe White

Swamp Music: The Complete Monument Recordings ★★½

FANFARE HANDMADE

No relation to Jack White, but he could be. Four discs of recordings from 1969–70 by a Louisiana Caucasian kid who dug soul, blues, country, walk-walk guitar noise, and who often rocked a guitar-and-drums duo. André Benjamin needs to cover "Ratiny Night" in his disco show.

Johnny Pacheco

El Maestro ★★

FANIA

A scorching two-disc anthology from this New York Dominican who, between cofounding the Fania label in the '60s and leading the label's supergroup (the Fania All-Stars) in the '70s, is due as much credit as any single person for inventing modern salsa. Plus, he made lively-playing music made, which is no mean feat.

Various Artists

Jewface ★★

REBOOT/STEREOPHONIC

Now that Borat has made meta-anti-Semitic comedy fair game for dinner-table conversation, this remarkable collection of Hebrew-dialect vaudeville tunes from the early 20th century is probably safe to play at your next Seder. How funny your bubble will find "My Yiddisha Mammy" or "Cohen Owes Me \$7 Dollars," however, is an open question.



Bow wow wow yippee yo yippee yoy: Dr. Dog follow their bliss, even if the pooch ain't feeling it.

bedazzled guitar rock. But Yoni is his most zealous effort yet: "When She Comes" weds a scrappy punk riff to a Phil Spector-ish braw-of-sound chorus, while "Smile in Denial" is an acidic mini-musical that even name-checks Grease. It's a lot to digest at times—the world really doesn't need more bass solos—but any overreaching is immediately forgiven upon hearing "Joke," a heart-stoppingly over-the-top epic that could be the finest power ballad since Axl used his illusions. **BRIAN RAFFERTY**

Lee Hazlewood Cake or Death ★★½

EVER

The fascinating curtain call of a brilliant, bizarre career Lee Hazlewood's farewell to the recording industry is as oblique as his journey through it, which took him from producing Duane Eddy to saving Nancy Sinatra's career to making a series of ever-more-baffling and often genius solo albums in the '70s. Other than a jazzy take on the classic "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'," Act III of his

life is best represented here—the twisted, modal interpolation of "The Star-Spangled Banner" in "Anthem" is his career in miniature: arguably inappropriate, undeniably beautiful, and deeply, importantly weird. **ANDREW BAUGHN**

Hella

There's No 666 in Outer Space ★★

PECCAT

Incomprehensible bombast from beefed-up noise duo Over the past five years, drum-

mer Zach Hill and guitarist Spencer Seim have maintained a position as the least compelling twosome on the techy, noise-rock totem pole (see Lightning Bolt, Ortheim, the USA is a Monster, etc.). Perhaps sensing stagnation, the Californians drafted three extra players—a second guitarist, a bassist, and a full-time vocalist. Knocking out hectic, aimless prog rock sprinkled with samplers, whistles, and momentary sax skronk, the quintet conjures the Mars Volta doing Zeppelin karaoke over two-bit Mr. Bungle. It makes sense that Bungle's Mike Patton signed them. But otherwise, not so much. **BRANDON STOLVY**

Kristin Hersh Learn to Sing Like a Star ★★

YEP! POP

Throwing Muse does not want what she hasn't got *Stos Learn to Sing Like Me* might've been a more accurate title for the latest solo album by this 40-year-old mother of four, whose mid-'80s power trio, Throwing Muses, laid the groundwork for subsequent women-in-rock heavyweights like Polly Jean Harvey and Sinéad O'Connor. Dialing down the fury of her new-wave neogunge act 50FootWave, Hersh reconnects with her arty folk-rock roots, as if trying to demonstrate her individualistic cutzpath. It won't satisfy hook-hungry jewel fans, but *Learn to Sing* wears Hersh's experience like a custom-tailored hair shirt. **MIKAEL WOOD**

Dustin Kensrue Please Come Home ★★

EQUAL VISION

Thrice frontman hates sin, loves acoustic guitars. Amen. Some artists use solo projects to chase wild hairs. But here, Dustin Kensrue exorcises tunes that are far too conservative—musically and ideologically—for Thrice, the heady, prog-leaning emo outfit he fronts. The twangy shuffle "I Knew You Before" decries materialism, promiscuity, and the media, but the thorny questions of faith that Kensrue grapples with in Thrice are smoothed out into straightforward, folk-fusion devotionals. For fans of both Ryan Adams and John Ashcroft. **DAVID PESSIER**

K-os Atlantis: Hymns for Disco ★★½

VIRGIN

Conscious hip-hopper flips through indie-rock Rolodex What if a Canadian rapper threw a party and his country's indie elite showed up? On K-os' third album, the MC extends his rock-side-trip with singer-songwriter Sam Roberts (2004's *Joyful Rebellion*) bringing in Roberts and Broken Social Scene's Kevin Drew to support his echoing vocals on "Valhalla," while Drew's bandmate Justin Peroff lays down staccato beats. Death From Above 1979's Sebastian Granger gives "Sunday Morning" a jumpy drum line, and Buck 65 adds baritone rhymes to soulful closer "Ballad of Noah." While Atlantis sacrifices some of *Rebellion's* gospel spirit, its collaborations push boundaries with eclectic nerve. **ALYSSA RASHBAUM**

Sondre Lerche Phantom Punch ★★★

ASTRALWERKS

Norwegian pop waltz decides to crank up his guitar On the heels of last year's *The Duper Sessions*—his total immersion in neo-Tin Pan Alley craftiness—Lerche obviously wanted to loosen up and rock a little. As evidence, skip to the title track, a wry Britpop jaunt with insistent guitar slashes, and the furious Green Day-by-way-of-Elvis Costello chummer "Face the Blood" ("Didn't ever think I'd be sleeping with the sharks," he opines). Though the hooks and melodies are spread a little thin elsewhere, Lerche still has a convincing charm in his lighter, acoustic moments, as on the wistful, wounded "After All." **DOUGLAS WATERMAN**

Lifetime Lifetime ★★

DECAVANTAGE/VELEBY BY RAMES

Hearts still on their sleeves, *mosh-pit masters return* More than ten years after they made it okay for tough-guy hardcore bands to write tear-eyed choruses, these New Jersey vets are back with a collection of sensitive yet brawny anthems that might have been recorded during their mid-'90s heyday. Though singer Art Katz frets about feeling out of touch with the kids on the rollicking sing-

They sound much more tormented than they look.



Wake-up Call

The heart-pounding party ends, but with a bit too much drama

Bloc Party

A Weekend in the City

★★★

VICE

Last fall, when this London quartet announced they were going on tour with emo hatchlings Panic! At the Disco (they later had to cancel), loyal Blocheads around the world cried foul: What could these anguished art rockers possibly have in common with a bunch of over-theatrical mopeys?

As it turns out, plenty. While 2005's *Silent Alarm* may not have been emo, it was cut with taut, icy-cold punk that was sexy as hell, full of forbidden glances,

panging lust, and heart-beating-out-of-its-chest anticipation. It was the sound of an actual panic at the disco.

A Weekend in the City concerns the comedown, when the clubs empty out at dusk and the kids are out fending for themselves. "I love you in the morning, when you're still strung out," Kele Okereke swoons on "Sunday," one of the several unapologetically emotive lines on *Weekend*. "Sunday" perhaps best demonstrates why Bloc Party's connection with its audience is so deeply entrenched: They're one of the few acts that can write a song about a hangover that will also sound great during a hangover.

But "Sunday" also summa-

rizes the musical frustrations that abound on *Weekend*: While it has a beautifully ascending chorus and a crackling, spare drumbeat, so does every other song on the album. In fact, not since U2 built an *Atomic Bomb* has

The band tries to turn each track into a breathless epic.

one band tried so hard to turn each track into a breathless epic. Sometimes it works, as with the corkscrew-tragic rave-up "Hunting for Witches" and the lovely, insomniac ballad "Kreuzberg." Too often, though, *Weekend* meshes together a little too seamlessly. **BRIAN RAFFERTY**

along "Can't Think About It Now," what this true-to-form reunion disc really proves is that, at least when it comes to melodic punk bands, the best comebacks are continuations of the past. **TREVOR KELLEY**

The Magic Numbers

Those the Brokes
★★★★½

CAPITOL

Brit siblings avoid sophomoric slump with dazzling tunes

This group's two pairs of unkempt brothers and sisters make homespun guitar pop that recalls the casual elegance of early R.E.M. But the real story of this breathtaking follow-up to 2005's self-titled debut is Romeo Stodart's transformation from merely a good songwriter to an outstanding one, with an effortless gift for piercing observations on affairs of the heart. ("Over" is not a word that you know," he sighs at one point). Less savvy bands should start covering his cunning tunes immediately. **JOH YOUNG**

Stephen Marley

Mind Control ★★★★★

TUFF GONG/UNIVERSAL

Heir to reggae's royal family honors dad's legacy

Mind Control is the solo debut by this son of Bob, but Stephen has done time in older brother

Ziggy's Melody Makers for years and produced much of younger brother Damian's work, including 2005's international hit *Welcome to Jamrock*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Stephen's music fits snugly between that of his two siblings: He kicks out dance-hall-inflected reggae/hip-hop jams, carefully balancing political fire and an island-life vibe. His ease with both elements would make his father proud. **MIKAEL WOOD**

The Mooney Suzuki

Have Mercy ★

V2

Played-out retro rockers lose what's left of their mojo

Hokey, jokey, and uninspired, the Mooney Suzuki's sputtering latest gasp expels what little remains of the New Yorkers' original garage-band fervor, revealing soul-free, thirdhand melodies housed in songs that any halfway decent bar band would reject without a second pass. The production polish only highlights the album's weaknesses, which include cringe-worthy lyrics, massive clichés depicted as a pseudo-ironic look at clichés ("First Comes Love"), and a six-minute boast-filled drug goof ("Good Ol' Alcohol"). That the band's goal—stuckly replicating killer '60s pop rock—is so obvious just magnifies how short they fall. **JOSH MODELL**

Marissa Nadler

Bird on the Water ★★★★★

PEACEFRUG

Acoustic meditations best heard after the lights go out

This Providence painter ditched her brush and transformed herself into a charming neo-folkie, summoning up effortless late-night reveries. Her third album features sweet, gentle vocals matched with lightly plucked guitar and the occasional cello or keyboard. Like any good artist, Nadler dips strange things like raincoats and graves, but she's most memorable when paying tribute to gal pals: "Sylvia" (a muse she finds underwater) and the tragically doomed "Rachel." **JASON GROSS**

Of Montreal

Hissing Fauna, Are You the Destroyer? ★★★★★

POLYVINYL

A giddy free-for-all from multitasking pop auteur

Athens, Georgia's Of Montreal have practically become a one-man psych band, and Kevin Barnes' pleasantly nasal voice—many, many multi-tracked versions of it—harmonizes on nearly every track of his eighth album. Zany as ever, Barnes runs himself ragged composing swirls of synth-heavy disco pop with inexplicable titles: "Faberge Falls for Shuggie" sounds like Scissor Sisters chillin' with Beck, while the gummy "Suffer for Fashion" sits reasonably well next to the Beatles-ish indie-tonica groove of "Cato as a Pun." *Hissing Fauna* might be an album of ego trips, but at least Barnes is on the good stuff. **CARYN GANZ**

The One AM Radio

This Too Will Pass ★★★★★

DANCETRO

Breathe deeply, proceed directly to the chill-out room: Devendra Banhart a little too treaky for you? Then singer/guitarist/drummer/cellist Hrishikesh Hirway may be the answer. Backed by mini string and horn sections, the Los Angeleno's third album has a relaxed, even-keeled feel, even though it was written while he shuttled between India and America dealing with personal upheavals. Think the Postal Service gone yoga or an unself-conscious James Taylor gone minimal techno—though nei-



The guys soften you up, then she delivers the death blow.

Slap and Tickle

Noise-pop heartthrobs still spazzing out

Deerhoof

Friend Opportunity

★★★★½

ROLL ROCK STARS/SBC

Lovable but high-maintenance, Deerhoof aren't one of indie rock's biggest crushes because they're easy. John Dieterich's guitars caterwaul, Satomi Matsuzaki's melodies are more charmed than sung, and rivet-punching drummer Greg Saunier plays like Keith Moon on a Red Bull bender. And that's just "The Perfect Me"—the cantering album opener, which compresses everything great about these spazz cadets into two minutes and 40 seconds.

Friend Opportunity is Deerhoof's eighth and most ambitious record, but it's also their most familiar, with the band nodding toward contemporaries and past luminaries alike. Spot-the-influence obsessives will discern chunks of Stereolab ("88," "Choco Fight") as well as bits of Built to Spill

("Cast Off Crown"). And far-flung pocket symphonies like "Whither the Invisible Birds?" pay tribute to Brian Wilson.

But with the helium-tinged Matsuzaki front and center, Deerhoof's music remains delightfully skewed. An apparent new affinity for classic rock is even twisted to fit their sound: "Believe E.S.P." comes powered by a slinky, Aerosmith strut and—wait for it—cowbell. And then there's "Look Away," an epic 12-minute closer that's compelling and difficult, with Matsuzaki

Deerhoof aren't one of indie rock's biggest crushes because they're easy.

cavorting like Robert Plant in the darkest depths of Mordor, chiming in amid smoked-up guitar wankery that's both gorgeous and atonal.

A bit much? Well, sure. But Deerhoof know that's what makes people fall in love with them.

SHANNON ZIMMERMAN



Hella: Grieffully butchering the Beatles

ther could come up with something as sweeping as "In the Time We've Got" or as dreamy as "Lest I Forget." **JASON GROSS**

Yoko Ono

Yes, I'm a Witch ★★★
ASTRAWEARS

Despite the extreme makeover, it's still the old Yoko Contemporary thinkers such as the Flaming Lips, Peaches, and Cat Power overhaul original Yoko Ono tracks on this hybrid tribute album; and while the results are mixed, they all retain the flowing quiver of Ono's inimitable vocals. Blow Up give "Every Man Has a

Woman Who Loves Him" a vaguely Western New Order gallop; Le Tigre giddily disco-fy "Sisters O Sisters"; Porcupine Tree make "Death of Samantha" gothlike. Mostly grainy rhythm-conscious pop rock, the collection manages to achieve formal freedom, hit-record verve, and one woman's personal supernatural. **JAMES HUNTER**

Elvis Perkins

Ash Wednesday ★★★½
XL RECORDINGS

Son survives tragedy, composes a haunting song cycle
Elvis Perkins has a singularly woeful story: He's the son of

actors Anthony Perkins (best known for *Psycho*), who succumbed to AIDS on September 12, 1992, and Berry Berenson, who was a passenger aboard an airplane hijacked on September 11, 2001. The latter fact is the defining influence on this mostly acoustic, wholly engaging debut, chronologically sequenced to pre- and postdate his mother's death. While the album begins with confident forays into folk pop, it takes a melancholic turn midway through, as the title and penultimate tracks swell with velvety strings, elegizing a tragic skyline. **JULIA SIMON**

The Psychic Paramount Origins and Primitives Vol. 1+2 ★★★★★

NO QUARTER

Closet-emptying sound clashes from Brooklyn guitarist

This prog-core power trio makes the Mars Volta sound like Phil Collins-era Genesis, such is the Paramount's pounding heft, guitar histrionics, and complicated message. (Check out 2005's amazing *Gomelon into the Mink Supernatural* for the full story.) This double CD is essentially an archive of Paramount guitarist Drew St. Ivy's ovoid guitar experiments from before the band existed. Save for a few grimy demos with drums, disc one echoes and reverbs like Philip Glass ringtones. Disc two's electro-acoustic shimmer is chill-out music for basement-show geeks. **JOE GROSS**

Sloan

Never Hear the End of It ★★★★★
VEP ROCK

Great White Northerners aim for "White Album" greatness These Canadian power-pop wizards routinely weave songs with dozens of parts. Now they've written an album with dozens of songs. *Never Hear the End of It*, Sloan's eighth studio full-length, contains 30 separate tunes—evidence of their bottomless bag of hooks, as well as a testament to endless Canadian winters, when leaving the studio ain't much of an option. The result plays like the greatest British Invasion best-of you've never heard. Reach in and pull out anything; even the so-so ones are gone in 60 seconds. **MIKAEL WOOD**

Sonic Youth

The Destroyed Room: B-sides and Rarities ★★★★★
Geffen

Odds and ends from those veteran guitar thinkers As aging punks who value the album-as-statement, Sonic Youth release anthologies that hang together remarkably well (see their indie-'80s primer and video collection *Screaming Fields of Sonic Love*). The *Destroyed Room* assembles various collectors' fodder from their major-label years: "Bull in the Heather" B-side "Razor



Jesse Sykes: She's guaranteed to haunt your every thought.

Blade" channels acoustic Royalt Trux (how very indie '90s!); "Kim's Chords" and "Beautiful Plateau" are bonus dang from the Japanese release of *Sonic Nurse*, while "Campfire" is a blipping Groovebox experiment. Some of the tracks sound pretty tossed-off, but it's nice to hear such a brainy bunch not overthinking things. **JOE GROSS**

Richard Swift Dressed Up for the Letdown ★★★★★

SECRETLY CANADIAN

Minnesota-bred troubadour makes his mark on humble Breezy yet downcast, Swift is Rufus Wainwright minus the operatic streak, crooning tales of disappointment and stress without making a spectacle of himself. While these elegant tunes easily could be turned into noisy epics, modest piano and guitar (plus occasional flugelhorn) suit them nicely, suggesting cabaret pop from the garage. The tender melodies of "The Million Dollar Baby" and "Most of What I Know" are the stuff of tear-stained dreams, hypnotic and strangely thrilling. **JOHN YOUNG**

Jesse Sykes & the Sweet Hereafter Like, Love, Lust & the Open Halls of the Soul ★★★★★

BARSLY

Woody, ghostly alt rock gems from Seattle chanteuse "Those were happy times," Jesse Sykes exhalates frostily over tremulous spy-movie guitar, but her lyrical interest in clouds, ghosts, and broken branches raises some doubts. Regardless, the riveting power noir of the *Sweet Hereafter* is



Not Fade Away

On scrappy second album, Internet phenoms prove they belong

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah

**Some Loud Thunder
★★★★½**

All of the dreams that little bands dream actually came true for Clap Your Hands Say Yeah. They sold a lot of albums without a record label, toured the world, earned endorsements from both the staunchest scenesters and industry bigwigs. Legends they probably idolized—David Byrne and David Bowie—appeared at their gigs. As 2005's indie-revival wound down, no new band meant more to the

blog-obsessed, BitTorrent-blasting generation of music consumers than they did. And while the band's uneven live shows have left more than a few early adopters dismayed, this set of songs recaptures much of their original nonchalant magic. It's intentionally raw, with singer Alec Ounsworth's already squeaky voice warped to near-painful levels of distortion on the title track, an unsure confessional constructed out some great opening verses. "That's just a part of the story," Ounsworth squeals. "Well, it could maybe be something complete."

Thunder has its familiar moments—the giddy faux-

disco "Satan Said Dance" and the pretty, Elvis Costello-like love song "Emily Jean Stock" have been staples of the band's live set—but it's also a deft move in an unexpectedly retro direction. "Underwater (You and Me)" finds

They recapture much of their original nonchalant magic.

Ounsworth sounding like Buddy Holly, and the rousing tale of nationalistic confusion "Yankée Go Home" borrows its architecture from Motown, but in a streamlined garage-pop way. So save your bandwidth, kids. It's a good one. **PETER GASTON**

her ticket to heaven. If 2004's *Oh, My Girl* sounded like Portishead holed up in a silo, *Like, Love, Lust* takes over the whole barn, wheeling out Farfisa, handclaps, cello, horns, and what sounds like the piano part from "I Wanna Be Your Dog." **SEAN HOWE**

Lewis Taylor

The Lost Album ★★ ★★

HACKTONE

Fan of the classics recreates the greatest jukebox ever. While some musicians who plunder the past dilute their source material (see Lenny Kravitz), British soul man Lewis Taylor does the opposite. His second U.S. release rides a wave of giddy enthusiasm, unleashing big noises lovingly swiped from Bee Gees, Jimi Hendrix, and umpteen others: "Let's Hope Nobody Finds Us" would make a fine addition to the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*. Playing every multicolored note himself, Taylor is an ingenious character. **JOY YOUNG**

Trans Am

Sex Change ★★ ★

THRILL SOCIETY

Jumpy dance rock never quite transcends its influences. Once the Atari 2600 of the

post-rock scene, D.C.'s Trans Am now allows their metronomic rhythms to loosen up and go disco when the mood suits. Primarily instrumental—with an occasional chanting vocal—their eighth album never rests in one spot. "Conspiracy of the Gods" could be Mission of Burma recast as prog rock; "4,738 Regrets" marries a jangly '80s new-wave riff to a kraut-rock groove; "Exit Management Solution" briefly channels New Order. For kicks, *Sex Change* should come with a reference manual. **ROB O'CONNOR**

Various Artists

Endless Highway: The Music of the Band ★★ ★ 1/2

420

They were much more than Bob Dylan's backup band. The Band were roots rockers before the term existed, but they often seem more legendary than listened to. This exquisite tribute to the Americana pioneers (and ace songwriter/guitarist Robbie Robertson, in particular) tries to change all that. Whether it's *Death Cab for Cutie's* shimmering "Rocking Chair," the Roches' Cajun-seasoned "Acadian Driftwood," or Guster's old-timey vibe on

"This Wheel's on Fire," *Endless Highway* does the group proud. Exceptions? Bruce Hornsby and the Noisemakers' jazz-lite "King Harvest" and Jack Johnson's clueless croon on "I Shall Be Released," which renders the dark, moving classic merely groovy. **PETER GERSTENZANG**

Various Artists

Music From the Motion Picture Black Snake Moan ★★ ★

NEW WEST

Gutbucket blues from Samuel L. Jackson and friends. In the new joint from *Hustle & Flow* director Craig Brewer, Jackson plays a grizzled bluesman (is there another kind?) who falls in with loony abuse victim Christina Ricci and chains her to his, um, radiator. The racial math here is pretty bananas, but somehow not as odd as a somewhat on-key Jackson running through immortal tunes like "Stack-o-Lee" and the title track. Meanwhile, the Black Keys break out big-beat whump, R.L. Burnside brings subterranean drone, and Jessie Mae Hemphill's "Standing in My Doorway Crying" simply breaks your heart. **JOE GROSS**

Essentials

Kraut Rock by BARRY WALTERS



Krautwerk

Autobahn
PHILLIPS, 1974
Evoking the modernity of Germany's high-speed superhighway with a nostalgic nod to the car-whispering songs of the ba-ba Beach Boys, kraut rock's international Top 40 radio breakthrough buoyed jolly German-language lyrics over humming synths and creates the sound of the future.

Can

Ege Bamyasi
NUTTE, 1972
Midway between their Stockhausen-schooled minimalist drones and the worldly jazz of their later years comes this funky peak that fueled post-punk. Fractured Middle Eastern guitar spasms amid James Brown grooves as Kenji "Damo" Suzuki croons and plays suspenseful abstractions.

Neu!

Neu!
BRINK, 1972
Ex-Krautwerk members Klaus Dinger and Michael Rother joined studio experimentalist Conrad Plank to invent an ethereal yet primal groove by layering melodic guitar noodling over a driving "motorik" beat. The quiet, floating bits anticipate Brian Eno's ambient music, while the pretty tantrums plot the way to Sex Pistols and Stereolab.

Tangerine Dream

Zeit
RELATIVITY, 1972
Kraut rock's austere droning tendencies max out into sublimely creepy nothingness. Four sloooooow, sideling tracks with titles like "Birth of Liquid Plejades" withhold melody and rhythm as malevolent gusts of church organ and primitive synth manipulation drift without destination.

Faust

The Faust Tapes
VIRGIN, 1973
As jarring and jovial as Zeit is monolithic and severe, this presciently nutty band's nonstop collage of lo-fi outtakes only honks and clangs for a minute or two before abruptly jerking into the next snippet of chaos. A few Syd Barrett-like bursts of whimsy break up the barrage, but not for long.

Amon Düül II

The UA Years 1969-1974
PURPLE PYRAMID, 1997
These Teutonic fury freaks were the first to put on vinyl what the British press would dub "kraut rock." Feed the deep-space sprawl of West Coast psychedelia via the conceptual consciousness of Nicotera Velvet Underground and the extreme physicality of the Stooges, delivered in snarling German accents.

Amon Düül II

Made in Germany
REPETOIRE, 1975
Newly pop-disciplined and expanded to seven members, ADI craft a satirical rock opera that reincarnates historical German icons as members of an uber-kraut band (with Adolf Hitler on drums), evoking a heavier, disenchanted Mamas and the Papas.

Manuel Göttsching

E2-4
INTEAM, 1984
This one-man jam by the guitar-shredder leading to pioneering kraut rockers Ash Ra Tempel stretches two guitar chords into one continuous hour of ever-changing ecstasy. It routinely rocked New York's legendary Paradise Garage disco, went on to ignite countless sampled knockoffs, and practically invented ambient techno.



FROM LEFT: AMY GUINCOBIS OUTLINE; BET ROBERTS

Winter Wonderland

Corporate thug takes his act widescreen, demands paycheck

Young Jeezy

The Inspiration: Thug Motivation 102 ★★½

DEF JAM

On *The Inspiration*, his second major-label album, Young Jeezy, a.k.a. the Snowman (no, he doesn't own a drive-way-plowing company), sticks with the kind of hustler/dealer-as-Everyman/Superman material that he covered on last year's *Let's Get It: Thug Motivation 101*. But this time around, it's as if the script has been reshot by Michael Bay—glossy and viscerally stimulating—and we're watching a coming attraction for a film that never starts.

This doesn't matter if you happen to like Michael Bay movies (guilty as charged). Over a dazzlingly cohesive collection of beats, the rapper gets larger than life. "Hypnotize" starts the blockbuster with Jeezy reintroducing

himself as a self-help guru ("I command you niggas to get money"), while Shawty Redd builds a nearly drum-free pillar of sci-fi keyboards with Morricone majesty. Timbaland's astounding beat for "3 A.M." is equally extraterrestrial, its kick drums like a UFO backfiring while Jeezy gets "higher than a pelican."

Except for the genuinely moving "Dreamin'," which concerns his

***The Inspiration* ignores the man to reinforce the myth.**

mother's battle with drug addiction and his guilt over facilitating it, *The Inspiration* ignores the man in an effort to reinforce the myth. Through repetition of words ("yeaaaah") and themes, you certainly will know how he gets down, but you'll have no idea how he gets there. Ultimately, Jeezy just shows up with the attitude, the ad-libs, and the punch lines, and lets it snow. Hell of a storm, though. **CHRIS RYAN**

Whatever happens in the trap, stays in the trap.



JONAH NANNING/COURTESY DEF JAM

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Lucinda Williams

West ★★★½

LOST HIGHWAY

Despite slips, another iconic world-weary journey

Leave it to Americana's favorite flimsy-something enfant terrible to set her greatest work against her worst. Producer Hal Willner weaves organ and violins through stunning vignettes like "Rescue" and anatomy-of-a-teardrop "Mama You Sweet," each nudged forward by Bill Frisell's jazzy hypno-wheels of guitar. But then some fault lines are revealed: "Come On" never improves from "Dude, I'm so over you / You don't even have a clue," and Williams' sub-G. Love rapping skills get nine very long minutes in the sun on

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"Wrap My Head Around That." But let those parts slide into the ocean and enjoy the remaining hour of perfectly golden brilliance. SEAN HOWE

James Yorkston

The Year of the Leopard ★★★½

DOMINO

Scottish troubadour goes lazing on a sunny afternoon

A perfect balance between languor and beauty can be almost unsettling: Songwriters who make wistful soul-mining feel shrugged-out rather than painstakingly crafted occupy a rare air. On his fourth album, James Yorkston floats through that sad-eyed realm with hope in his heart, gently tugging at modest acoustic melodies alongside tasteful pianos and strings, easing into areas previously navigated by Will Oldham, but finding a more tangible emotional strength. Even a spoken-word track feels enchantingly unforced. JOSH MODEL

Youth Group

Casino Twilight Dogs ★★★

ANTI-/EPITAPH

Because every generation deserves its Matthew Sweet. A double-platinum act in their native Australia and a cult act here best known for a cover of Alphaville's "Forever Young" on *The OC*, Youth Group make civilized, bracingly lovely pop. Singer Toby Martin finds the sweet spot between Pet Shop Boy and Neil Tennant's plaintive croon and New Pornographer Carl Newman's seductive bark, and *Casino Twilight Dogs* is that most welcome of albums: a great driving record that exquisitely soundtracks crushes and heartbreaks. The future mix-tape hit "Sorry" showers an old lover with chiming guitar kisses before saying farewell forever, and "The Destruction of Laurel Canyon" ruminates about California falling into the sea. Somewhere, Seth Cohen is freaking out. JOE GROSS



Youth Group: Surviving *The OC* way better than Mischa Barton

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Ghost Rider ★★★

2K/PS2, PSP

Anthero puts on gasoline boots and walks through hell

The upcoming *Ghost Rider* film has had comic book fans bent out of shape for months based on the trailer alone, but luckily this digital version has no ties to anything Involving Nicolas Cage. Steeped in the mythology of one of Marvel's darker characters—stuntman Johnny Blaze sells his soul to the devil and lives out his eternity as a vengeance demon—the game relies on an excellent story

written by nerd-fave scribes Garth Ennis and Jimmy Palmiotti. Balancing flame-throwing battles with high-octane motorcycle chases, *Ghost Rider*'s best asset is its willingness to embrace the pitch-black spirit of the character, all the way down to his ability to suck out the souls of enemies and destroy them with a demonic stare. Hell has rarely been this cool. **KYLE ANDERSON**



Elebits ★★★

KONAMI/WII

Tiny sprites provide cute voices, endless electricity

The conceit of the Nintendo Wii controller—it handles like a remote and moves with you—is not only technologically impressive, but also unexpectedly transcendent. Under normal circumstances, *Elebits* would seem like little more than a young-skewing shooter with a clever premise: in an alternate reality, all energy is generated by tiny creatures who have been scared into

hiding, and it's your job to find them and restore power to your expansive abode. But with a flick of the wrist, the help of a grappling laser (to aid in toasting around furniture), and a bevy of power-ups (to draw the little buggers out of hiding), you can turn various rooms in the house completely upside down. If only lighting up the world were as easy as destroying the kitchen. **K.A.**

Also Out This Month



Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney: Justice for All

UBISOFT/PS2, NINTENDO DS

Mystery and melodrama combine in an ode to courtroom dramas, starring a bumbling defense attorney known for cheeky asides and aerodynamic hair. It's a little test-heavy (the "action" involves interrogating witnesses or presenting evidence), but its manic spirit makes it addictive. **SCOTT STEINBERG**



Star Wars Lethal Alliance

UBISOFT/PS2, NINTENDO DS

George Lucas pads his pockets with another shallow sci-fi blaster. A tentacle-headed gunslinger named Rianna Saren tumbles around 3-D levels while dodging electrified barriers and trading colorful laser blasts with stormtroopers. The cliché-ridden setup and stale special effects make it more *Phantom Menace* than *New Hope*. **S.S.**



Hotel Dusk: Room 215

NINTENDO DS/NINTENDO DS

In a noirish Los Angeles circa 1979, gumshoe Kyle Hyde snoops around a mysterious inn, questioning suspects and searching for clues to his friend's disappearance. Taking full advantage of the DS's touch screen, the game looks and plays like a living comic book—backgrounds are in color, but characters pop in gritty black and white, giving it a depth of style rarely found on portable systems. **S.S.**



God of War II ★★★

SONY/PS2

Ultraviolet ancient-world destruction never looked so pretty

It's hard to improve upon greatness and theoretically impossible to top perfection, but the makers of *God of War* have done just that, probably violating the rules of time and space in the process. Long-suffering warrior Kratos returns, still haunted by the memory of his slain family, and again fights off a cavalcade of demons and mythological beings with the trusty "Blades of Chaos" that

are permanently bonded to his body and held there by heavy, sometimes flame-engulfed chains. The battles are bloodier, the controls tighter and simpler, and the environments inspire even more awe. *God of War II* arrives just in time for the PS2 to become obsolete, but it's still epic and will make you wish you'd never slept through your Greek mythology class in college. **K.A.**



Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol ★★★

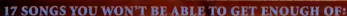
KONAMI/PS2

Simon hates your version of "Crazy Little Thing Called Love"

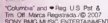
Like *Guitar Hero* and *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol* jettisons the traditional controller entirely and instead utilizes microphones that read the quality of your pitch, so you can croon one of 40 songs (including such AI workhorses as "Total Eclipse of the Heart" and "Do I Make You Proud")

and get judged by the digital Simon and Randy (Paula is conspicuously absent; perhaps in this reality she's still too busy collaborating with MC Skat Kat). While the single-player story is fun, this is the ideal title to fire up with some friends and see who can become the next Kelly Clarkson (or the next William Hung). **K.A.**

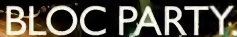
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3.16 WORCESTER, MA
3.17 PHILADELPHIA, PA
3.18 WASHINGTON, D.C.
3.19 BALTIMORE, MD
3.20 COLUMBIA, SC
3.22 ST. PETERSBURG, FL



Jackson's got the blues.

Chick Flicked

Race and sex burn in an overheated potboiler

Black Snake Moan ★ SAMUEL L. JACKSON, CHRISTINA RICCI PARAMOUNT VANTAGE, R

While *Black Snake Moan* seems to unfold in a realm of synthetic fantasy—a hybrid of hip-hop's Dirty South, a bluesman's back roads, and the *Dile* of '70s exploitation flicks—it's actually set in a corner of Tennessee where a white girl named Rae (Ricci) holds the title of town slut. She's got a boyfriend, but the moment he leaves for National Guard duty, she starts feeling a demonic libidinal itch. The moment after that, she's scratching it in a motel room, kindly assisted by a large black drug dealer, who plows her hard. Pardon the expression, but crude provocation is the going tone here.

A few scenes cynically pretend to explain that Rae suffered sexual abuse as a child and has since become soul-sick with nymphomania. A black farmer named Lazarus (Jackson) finds out as much after discovering her unconscious. Lazarus has withdrawn from the world since his wife left him, and his very name—I told you this was crude—signals that he needs to return from the dead. So, as a Christian deed, he pledges to rid Rae of her wickedness. To keep her out of harm's way, he



locks her to his radiator, and the camera licks its lips at the sight of a half-naked woman in chains.

Writer/director Craig Brewer has whipped up a controversy that will make some fans of his first film, *Hustle & Flow*, retract anything they said in defense of its depiction of women. Jackson, meanwhile, seems to be playing a character from another era—heating Rae with soulful guitar playing, "fixin' to go get

The camera licks its lips at the sight of a half-naked woman in chains.

some medicine," and so on. The movie's heart is on display in its title sequence, where Rae, strutting down a country road in a Confederate flag T-shirt and shorts that Dabby Duke would deem too skimpy, gives the finger to a towering John Deere vehicle that wants to pass. It's the movie in miniature: slick, charged with racial and sexual tension, and gleefully in your face. And that's all there is to it.

Reno 911! Miami

★★½

THOMAS LEVINSON

KERRI KENNEY-SILVER

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX, R

Nevada numbskulls export their arrested development

The sheriff's department from Comedy Central's semi-improvised cops spoof buses it to Miami for a police convention and winds up responsible for patrolling its streets—an awful lot of ground for eight horny idiots to cover all by themselves. Lt. Jim Dangle and his officers need to foil a terrorist plot and bust a Scarface-aping drug lord, but their investigations lead, more typically, to a topos beach, where they blow up the rotting corpse of a whale. Maddeningly hit-or-miss, *Reno 911!* plays as if the filmmakers were aiming simply to outclass *Police Academy 5*. They manage that much: A few grand moments of low farce hit the sweet spot, and one tracking shot—the camera peers into motel rooms as the cops, separate but synchronized, engage in frenzied self-pleasure—is so elaborate and gross it's like *Orson Welles* directing *American Pie*.

Starter for 10

★★★½

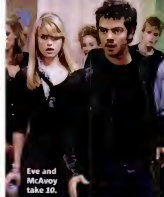
MICHAEL MCAVOY, ALICE EVE

PICTUREHOUSE, PG-13

Brits breathe fresh life into coming-of-age drama

Adhering to every convention of the coming-of-age film in a sneakily alluring way and flirting with cliché without sobbing all over it, this sweet little date-night flick is built to charm everyone's inner 18-year-old. Brian Jackson, a striking kid from England's bleak-sky seashore, heads to a posh college and becomes the star of a TV quiz tournament. Will he finally come to terms with his dear father's death? learn the real meaning of integrity? discover true love with the fancy

Reno 911!'s cops find a new use for Krazy Glue.



Eve and McAvoy take 10.

and frivolous blonde or the protest-marching brunette? You know the answers, but *McAvoy* plays Brian with a tenderness that makes you want to watch closely for them, to see how the movie finds life in an old formula.

Avenue Montaigne

★★★

CÉCILE DE FRANCE,

VALÉRIE LÉMERCIER

THINKFILM, NOT YET RATED

Delightful French pastry offers little to chew on

Jessica, one of those sparkling pixies who drift through French movies like a birdsong, waits tables in Paris, serving sandwiches and compassionate smiles to artsy souls in turmoil: the rubber-faced soap opera actress dying for a meaty film role, the aging art collector set to kiss his treasures goodbye, the world-famous pianist who will crack if he has to cram himself into his monkey suit again and play one more stuffy concert hall. Because Jessica is a French-movie pixie, she has a knack for crossing these people's paths at just the right moment, and they, in turn, have an unnatural enthusiasm for discussing Life and Art with the woman bringing them lunch. Because the movie—bright as a postcard and flooded with music ranging from richest Beethoven to bittersweet ballads—is enchanting at its core, the creaky plot doesn't matter that much. Sit back, admire the character sketches, and just say *c'est la vie*.



The Cure's Robert Smith

SPOTLIGHT ON

The Music of Starter for 10

Though set in the mid-'80s, *Starter for 10* never resorts to cutesy period markers: There's neither a Rubik's Cube in sight nor a Hurley Lewis hit to be heard. Instead, the soundtrack underlines the hero's moments of suik and joy with welcome sophistication. We get silvers of post-punk from Echo and the Bunnymen and the Psychedelic Furs, the indelible tremble of the Undertones' "Teenage Kicks," and, again and again, mooping marvelously, the Cure. The mix will either inspire a fine nostalgia trip or deliver a lesson in how your elders used to brood.



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Days of the Nü

Deftones search for meaning—very, very loudly BY KYLE ANDERSON

The end of the nü-metal/rap-rock revolution was a double-edged sword for Deftones, the Sacramento quintet that always had more in common with King Crimson than with Big Daddi Kane. Eventually, they were able to break free from the Korn/Limp Bizkit collective, but they were also stripped of any sort of context, set adrift in a sea of their own strange arrangements and jagged noise.

Based on their December 5 performance at New York's Nokia Theatre, they're still drifting, and the set confirmed the band's standing as an entirely unique outfit without any identity whatsoever. There was a nod to hip-hop: They entered to Dr. Dre's "The Next Episode" (which prompted a crowd sing-along when the last line,

"Hey-ay-ay-ay / Smoke weed every day," rang out); and frontman Chino Moreno still sported the long tube socks and huge shorts that are now standard-issue skate-rap wear. But once Deftones turned up the amps, any bit of funkiness was erased by droning guitars and Moreno's distorted, blown-speaker vocals. Moreno was also not very chatty—his between-song banter consisted of "Whassup, New York?" and a reference to the Duran Duran album *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*, much to the confusion of the tattooed and pierced diadems at the front of the stage.

That mass stayed comfortable throughout—there wasn't



a whole lot of moshing or crowd surfing, except when the band ripped into old favorites. In their defense, Deftones have never been the type to get people banging around, and the set list skewed heavily toward the Tool-esque work that has made up the bulk of their last two albums. The evening's one flash of transcendence was "Passenger," a moody masterpiece from 2000's *White Pony* that featured Maynard James Keenan on vocals (live, Moreno handled Keenan's part adroitly). The fuller, more melodic moments—like "Minerva" and "Change (In the House of Files)"—showcased Deftones' greatest trick: balancing atmospheric experimentation and feedback jams with good old-fashioned arena-ready anthems.

Because aging mooks need nostalgia, too, the audience unfortunately demanded that Deftones play against

The audience demanded that Deftones play against their strengths.

their strengths, and the best reactions of the night came during juvenile ragers like "My Own Summer (Shove It)" and "7 Words." Moreno never even mentioned the existence of 2006's *Saturday Night Wrist*, and though a half-dozen of its tracks were included, the band played them almost apologetically, and the crowd was nonplussed. That album shows Deftones evolving into a powerful, almost psychedelic monster that has little relationship to 1995's raw, in-your-face *Adrenaline*, but the future seems awfully far away when your fans keep you tethered to yesterday.

Acting their rage: [1] Singer Chino Moreno screams in horror at his choice of socks; [2] Moreno is momentarily engulfed by fickle fans; [3] bassist Chi Cheng wishes he'd drunk that Last Red Bull; [4] the set list in question



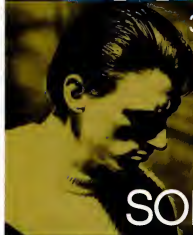


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Circus Maximus: Ringmaster Brendon Urie and his ladies-in-waiting: Urie has his Liberace moment (right); guitarist Ryan Ross



Parents' Night Out

Panic! At the Disco stage an R-rated spectacle BY MIKAEL WOOD

Panic! At the Disco are nobody's definition of family-friendly entertainment. On *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out*, the Las Vegas foursome's platinum debut, frontman Brendon Urie sings about trophy wives, pills prescribed to offset shakes, and being "a better fuck than any boy you'll ever meet." Nonetheless, at Panic!'s sold-out December 6 show at Southern California's Long Beach Arena—one of the final dates the band played in support of *Fever*—hundreds of grade-school boys and girls were accompanied by their parents, some enthusiastically decked out in plus-size Hot Topic gear, others eyeing the mascara'd masses with a mixture of wonder and fear.

The majority of Panic!'s emo-scene peers would view this uncool invasion

of moms and dads as a necessary form of collateral damage—the price of wooing fans too young to drive themselves to a concert. But Panic! are unlike most emo bands in most every way. In this age of MySpace-fueled accessibility, Urie and 20-year-old musical mastermind Ryan Ross seem less interested in

They presented a show designed to maximize the squirm factor.

presenting themselves as aw-shucks Everydudes than in cultivating a sophisticated showbiz mystique. (Blame early exposure to Siegfried & Roy.) And though Ross grounds Panic!'s music in the genre's buzzsaw guitar chug, he tricks it out with juicy techno beats and vaudeville breakdowns.

So instead of ignoring the parents in

the audience, Panic! took advantage of the situation by presenting a show evidently designed to maximize the squirm factor. The organizing concept was a big-top circus, complete with dancers, contortionists, stilt-walkers, and a deep-voiced MC promising "an amazing spectacle of sights and sounds." Yet this was no Ringling Bros. experience: Decked out in ruffled baby-doll dresses, the dancers ripped off their costumes to reveal much smaller ones inspired by Christina Aguilera's "Dirty" phase, while the 19-year-old Urie took regular swigs from a wine glass (not filled with wine, according to a band publicist).

That kind of provocation is encoded in rock'n'roll's DNA, of course, but not so much in emo. Rather than work the typical sensitive-guy angle, Urie emphasized the dark edges of Panic!'s music—

the emotional cynicism and sexual paranoia that the band seems too fresh-faced to have felt firsthand. This led to more than a few interesting moments. For example, what were the mothers of the kids singing along supposed to think when Urie announced during "Time to Dance" that "boys will be boys" as the Jumbotron flashed a desperate-looking dancer locked inside a cage? What about when Urie pretended to make out with Ross, or when the cheating bride in "I Write Sins Not Tragedies"—the one Urie brands a "whore"—appeared onstage made up like a drag queen? Panic! offered no answers, but reveled in the contradictions and complications. And they guaranteed an interesting ride home.

Where to Buy



My Chemical Romance

Cover and pages 52-57: From left, on Tori: Diesel jeans, diesel.com. On Bryar: Guess jeans, guess.com. On Iero: Calvin Klein jeans pants, Macy's stores. On Mikey: Energie jeans, energie.it. On Gerard: Calvin Klein shirt and tie, Macy's stores.

The Shins

Pages 5 and 68-72: On Sandoval: DKNY jacket, \$695, and pants, \$295, dknynyc.com. H&M shirt, \$40, hm.com. Ben Sherman tie, benscherman.com. Marc Jacobs shoes, \$475, marcjacobs.com. On Mercer: Gucci jacket, \$2,295, and pants, \$775, gucci.com. Dior Homme by Hedi Slimane shirt, \$340, dior.com. Valentino bow tie, \$125, 800-997-0140. H&M socks, \$5, hm.com. Lacoste shoes, lacoste.com. On Hernandez: Ted Baker suit, \$12,343-8989. J. Lindeberg shirt, \$165, jlindeberg.com. Thom Browne tie, \$200, Barneys New York, NYC. Converse sneakers, \$42, converse.com. On Crandall: Marc by Marc Jacobs jacket, marcjacobs.com. Calvin Klein shirt, \$78, Macy's stores. Valentino bow tie, \$125, 800-997-0140. Ben Sherman pants, benscherman.com. PF Flyers sneakers, \$90, pflyers.com. Jack Spade sunglasses, Malecat, NYC.

Cinematics

Pages 8 and 40: On Rinning: J. Lindeberg shirt and tie, jlindeberg.com.

Bloc Party

Pages 58 and 59: On Moakes: H&M sweater and jeans, hm.com. On Lissak: Levi's jeans, levi.com. Trash & Vaudeville belt, 212-982-3590. On Tong: Lacoste shirt, \$110, lacoste.com. Levi's jeans, levi.com. On Okereke: Fred Perry shirt, \$69, 99nyc.com. Nudie jeans, nudiejeans.com.

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah

Pages 62-64: On Lee: Barneys sweater, barneys.com. Levi's jeans, levi.com. Adidas sneakers, adidas.com. On Greenhalgh: A.P.C. sweater, apc.fr. Levi's jeans, levi.com. On Guerit: Marc Ecko jeans, shopecko.com. On Ounsworth: Levi's shirt and jeans, levi.com. On Tyler: Benetton shirt, benetton.com. Diesel jeans, diesel.com. Converse sneakers, converse.com.

Kaiser Chiefs

Page 66: On Balnes: Puma sneakers, puma.com. On Hodgson: Modern Amusement polo shirt, modernamusement.com. Filippa K pants, filippak.com. Le Coq Sportif sneakers, zappos.com. On White: Belstaff coat, belstaff.com. Levi's jeans, levi.com. On Wilson: Aquascutum coat, aquascutum.com. Rag & Bone jacket, rag-bone.com. Nudie jeans, nudiejeans.com. Converse sneakers, converse.com. On Rix: Full Circle jacket, kilmout.com. Nudie jeans, nudiejeans.com. Dasser sneakers, 111vox.com.

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NEW + WEST

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NORTHEAST



Boston

FEBRUARY 17
SHAUN & SUZI'S 14TH ANNUAL MARDI GRAS BALL
 T.T. the Bear's Master parades and masqueraders Shaun Wolf Wortis and Suzi Lee usher in their annual headwound with the Voodoo Krewe All-Star Mardi Gras Band and a variety of hometown rockers (previous performers have included Tanya Donnelly and Gary Cherone). The show will benefit the New Orleans Musicians' Clinic. (\$12; www.mordigrasballs.com; 617-492-2327)

FEBRUARY 23-27

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CITY OF MAHOAGANY

Cutler Majestic Theatre
 Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's dark and satiric opera has influenced the likes of Lars Von Trier and Broadway's *Chicago* and *Cabaret*, while its music has spawned covers by the Doors, Marilyn Manson, and Bowie. (\$24-\$39; www.maj.org)

New York

DATÉ TBA
LE ONE NIGHT STAND Bar 13
 From Scandinavian rock to Japanese pop, Melody Nelson and Sheila B. keep things wanton and worldly at this dance party with an international theme. (\$1; www.myspace.com/leonightstand)

FEBRUARY 30 2007 PLUG INDEPENDENT MUSIC AWARDS

Irving Plaza
 David Cross is set to host this ceremony, honoring nominees such as Cat Power, the Knife, and the Hold Steady. There are performances by Deerhoof and EL+P, plus some super-secret and supersecret guests. (Free; www.plugawards.com)

FEBRUARY 17 BAROMETER POWER HOUR: PJ CAMPBELL

Barometer
 This odd and avant boutique/gallery showcases the paintings of RISO wunderkind Campbell amid a rapid-fire assault of Italo disco ditties (played one minute at a time), plus attic objects, art, jewelry, and antique honey wallpaper. (Free; www.barometernyc.com)

FEBRUARY 19 MOTHERF--KER

Location TBA
 The pioneering indie party-starters celebrate Lincoln and Washington with some dancing and decadence. Past guests

have included Bloc Party and Morningwood. (Price TBA; www.motherfuckernyc.com)

SOUTH



Atlanta

FEBRUARY 18
DVD SHOOT WITH SEAN COSTELLO
 Smith's Olde Bar
 Local pretty-boy prodigy Sean Costello lays down some mean electric blues before the cameras, in prep for his upcoming DVD. (\$12; www.smiths-oldebar.com)

FEBRUARY 24
SILVER SCREAM SPOOK SHOW
 Plaza Theatre
 Ghoulish MC Professor Morte delivers classic horror/sci-fi thrillers (this month, it's a new print from the original Japanese negative of *Mothra*) along with skulls, screams, and "hot ghoulish-on-ghoul action" by Blast-off Burlesque. (\$10; www.plazaatlanta.com)

Austin

THURSDAYS COUNTRY DANCE LESSONS

Broken Spoke
 Learn the two-step, stick your face in a plate of the best chicken-fried steak in town, and watch the hoo-haws yee-haw at one of Austin's most classic dance halls. (\$8; www.broken-spokeaustintx.com)

FEBRUARY 3 CARNAVAL BRASILEIRO

Palmer Events Center
 Whether you're going for the drums or the chance to make out with total strangers sporting sequins on their nether regions, Carnival is crowded, loud, and essential midwinter madness. (\$32; www.carnaval-austin.com)

Miami

DAILY JIMBO'S PLACE, VIRGINIA KEY

Officially a spot to buy shrimp bait and beer, this de facto party spot showcases constant jam sessions by reggae and rock

acts and the rare rave hosted by Avenue D. (Free; www.jimbosplace.com)

FEBRUARY 25

MERCE IN MIAMI WITH SIGUR RÖS
 Ziff Ballet Opera House
 Iceland's otherworldly mood crew performs part of the score (which also features Radiohead in absentia) to Merce Cunningham's 2003 dance piece *Split Sides* in honor of the modern-dance master. (\$15-\$65; www.miami-pac.org)

New Orleans

THURSDAYS
FAST TIMES '80s DANCE NIGHT
 One Eyed Jack's
 Senesters too young for the True Colors World Tour make like they raided Cyndi Lauper's closet in 1984, then stand in a block-long line waiting to take to the B-52's and Beastie Boys. (\$5; www.oneeyedjacks.net)

FEBRUARY 3
KREWE DU VIEUX French Quarter
 The theme for 2007's first Mardi Gras parade is

President's Day
 at Mother's-Are
 In New York

"Habitat for Insanity." Chris Rose will be the king reigning over floats of phallic and/or political orientation. (Free; www.kreweduvieux.org)

FEBRUARY 15

KREWE OF MUSES

Upturn
The daughters of Zeus are brought back to life for one night during Mardi Gras to unleash their powers. The all-girl parade turns out spectacular floats and throws all things glittery and girly into the crowd. (Free; www.kreweofmuses.org)

Oxford, Mississippi

FEBRUARY 1

MAYHEM STRING BAND

Two Sticks
At this Southern-fried sushi joint, the spicy crawfish rolls and spicier intermingling of Ole Miss sorority girls and women's studies majors override the mixed bag of local (usually jam) bands. (Price TBA; www.twosticks.net)

FEBRUARY 9-11

FOURTH ANNUAL OXFORD FILM FESTIVAL

American Screenworks Theater
The town that Faulkner wrote everything from standard features to kids' shorts at a film fest that hands out a "Hok" award (inspired by a local Indian princess) as their answer to an Oscar. Previous participants have included Oscar-nom'd Adrian Belic of *Genghis Blue* fame. (Passes \$7-\$30; www.oxfordfilmfest.com)

SOUTHWEST



Phoenix

MYSPACE PRIVATE PARTY Q Lounge

"Private" In the sense that if you have a MySpace page, you're in. Stiff drinks, delicious barbecue, and live music from local acts, such as Metalhead, pump up the lounge atmosphere. (Free; www.bobbyq.net)

FEBRUARY 4

NO FESTIVAL REQUIRED

Modified Arts
Microcinema showcases international shorts exploring political and societal changes in the world. Films have come from more than 43 countries, including Palestine and Antarctica. (Free; www.noifestivalrequired.com)

FEBRUARY 22 AND 23

3 REDNECK TENORS

Del E. Webb Center, Wickenburg
From the Village People to Verdi, cousins Billy Bob, Billy Joe, and Billy Billee meld white-trash culture with opera in this comedy musical. (\$30; www.delwebbcenter.org)

FEBRUARY 25

DR. SKETCHY'S ANTI-ART SCHOOL

Trunk Space
Artist Rachael Bess offers an alternate take to dry, art-school drawing classes, with participants sketching fetish and burlesque

models while listening to local experimental bands like *Asleep in the Sea* and *Lymbic*. \$40 min. (\$7; www.thetrunkspace.com)

WEST



Bay Area

THURSDAYS

ATOMIC

Blank Club, San Jose
DJ Basura has turned this rock club into an electro dance haven, spinning Peaches, She Wants Revenge, and Depeche Mode for cool kids of the South Bay. (Free before 10 p.m., \$4 after; www.theblankclub.com)

FEBRUARY 2-18

18TH ANNUAL VALENTINE'S DAY WOO AT THE ZOO

San Francisco Zoo
Indulge in champagne and chocolate while getting a multimedia lesson on animal mating behaviors. Adults only, please. (\$50; www.sfzoo.org)

FEBRUARY 3

MUSIC MACHINE

Sofa Lounge, San Jose
From Debbie Deb to A Tribe Called Quest to Björk, expect any and everything music at this hyperactive house party, which poses as a posh sofa-laden den of sin. (\$5; www.sofaloungej.com)

FEBRUARY 6

BAGEL RADIO'S FOURTH BIRTHDAY PARTY

Bottom of the Hill, San Francisco
The two-time honoree as

the San Francisco Bay Guardian's Best DJ of the Bay celebrates with a headlining set by the spastic banjo and melodic masters Birdmonster. (\$8; www.bogradio.com)

FEBRUARY 10

THREE KINDS OF STUPID

Rickshaw Stop, San Francisco
Unpretentious dance freak-out ranging from booty rap to French go-go to new wave. Stay late to get hypy with East Bay reniver Trackademics. (\$8; www.myspace.com/threekindsofstupid)

FEBRUARY 17 AND 28

NOISE POP MUSIC FESTIVAL

Various venues
Celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Bay's shock-rocking fest with performances by Sebadoh's original lineup, Ted Leo and the Pharmacists, Clinic, Hella, John Lurie, and tons more. (Free; www.noisepop.com)

Denver

FEBRUARY 3

FREE FIRST SATURDAY

Denver Art Museum
Daniel Libeskind's behemoth new metallic museum has put the Mile High City on the stargazing map. If you don't know your vertigo, check it out. (Free; www.denverartmuseum.org)

FEBRUARY 16

KILL CUPID PARTY

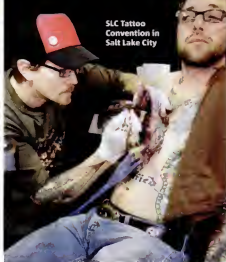
Mexal Restaurant
Punch romance in the face with margarita specials, 250 types of tequila, and a matter-of-fact valentine/shoe-box drop-off service provided by the establishment. (Price TBA; www.mexalrestaurant.com)

Las Vegas

MONDAYS

BRANDED

Double Down Saloon
For the parched and impudent, try the Ass Jockey or the Bacon Martini while Dis spin funk, punk, soul, new wave, mod, indie rock, Britpop, old-school hip-hop, '60s novelty rock, and exotica. (Free; www.doubledownsaloon.com; 702-791-5775)



SLC Tattoo Convention in Salt Lake City

WEDNESDAYS

OPEN TABLE

RA Sushi

At this open-deck night, guest DJs (and amateur) hit harder than a sake bomb with the hottest rock, retro, and mash-ups. The look here is distinctly Synchronicity-era Sting. And if you're hungry, approach the Gojira rail with extreme caution—hot! (Free; www.rausushi.com; 702-696-0008)

Los Angeles

MONDAYS

STOKED

Beauty Bar
Punk's not dead—on Mondays, at least. Beauty Bar's dirty affair runs the not-so-diverse gamut of punk, sort of punk, and indie punk. Think Sonic Youth, the Runaways, and the Replacements. (Free; www.beautybar.com)

WEDNESDAYS

CLUB MOSCOW

Boardner's of Hollywood
From Jeff Beck to Kiefer Sutherland, this landmark dive bar has hosted all kinds of stylish drunks. Draws in droves with its requisite playlist of electro, indie, '80s, and punk. (Price varies; www.boardners.com)

FEBRUARY 13 AND 17

SPLIT YOUR PANTS

The Cock 'n Bull, San Francisco
This dance party tries its damndest to convert a British sports pub into a hipster hideaway two Saturdays per month. Play pool over Wolf Parade and darts during Dr. Dog. (\$5; www.splityourpantsla.com)

FEBRUARY 14 AND 28

AWESOMETOWN

Short Stop
Anne Lee, Imma Robot's Alex Liebert, and others spin new wave and new indie, like the Knife, Justice, and LCD Soundsystem. Not to be confused with Andy Samberg's TV pilot. (Free; www.myspace.com/awesometownla)

Salt Lake City

FEBRUARY 9-18

WINTER PRIDE 2007

Various venues
Utah Pride Center promotes community interaction and tolerance of the local GLBT community through 20-plus events, including films, exhibits, dinners, dances, and "Carnival in Rio." (Price varies; www.slctattoo.org)

FEBRUARY 16-18

SLC TATTOO

Salt Palace Convention Center
This fourth annual

international ink slingers to a venue just blocks from the LDS Church Temple. Daily awards given to Best Sleeve, Best Back, etc. (\$20 contest entry; www.slctattoo.org)

San Diego

TUESDAYS

JAZZ JAM

Onyx Room
The city's best trumpeter, Gilbert Castellanos, who has recorded with Dizzy Gillespie and Wynton Marsalis, gathers top improvisational players for one of the few jazz nights that isn't just for baby boomers. (Free; www.onyxroom.com)



Krewe of Muses in New Orleans

WEDNESDAYS

METAL SKOOL

Typoon Saloon
Aqua Net's shareholders can thank this '80s hair-metal tribute night for single-handedly reviving hairspray, fishnets, and haphazardly torn half-shirts. Packed every week for bad, ironic cover tunes. (\$7; www.myspace.com/typoonsooon; 858-373-3444)

FEBRUARY 5 AND 19

TRIVIA NIGHT

What rocker was arrested for urinating on the Alamo while wearing his wife's dress? Ozzy Osbourne, of course. Punks gather at this geriatric dive bar for a pop-culture trivia joust and "Name That Celebrity Moustache" contest. (\$5; www.myspace.com/sclorifoffice)

NORTHWEST



Portland, Oregon

FEBRUARY 4

SINFERO CABARET

Dantes
Maybe an eternity in hell isn't so bad. At least it isn't if it's based on Portland's Sinferno Cabaret, a night

populated by fire and belly dancers, DJs, and a live band. (\$6; www.donteslive.com)

FEBRUARY 8

MEMORY LEAK

FIASCO
Ground Kontrol
David Chandler, a.k.a. Solenoid, is the undisputed father of Portland's electronic music scene—or scenes, that is, since his styles range from 4/4 dance-floor bumps to head-spinning acid abstractions. (Free; www.groundkontrol.com)

FEBRUARY 17 AND 18

DRUNK PUPPET NITE

Winningsstad Theatre
Ever wonder how alcohol affects puppets? It isn't pretty. Rather, it's lewd, violent, often hilarious, and occasionally beautiful. (Price T&A; www.monkeywrenchpuppetshop.org)

MIDWEST



Chicago

FEBRUARY 2

DI HIROKI

Debonair Social Club
This new intimate dance club/boutique/gourmet restaurant features a futuristic light-up disco floor,

high-art video installations, and Hiroki's high-class and kickass house mixes. (Price T&A; www.debonairsocialclub.com)

FEBRUARY 13

CHICAGO AUTO SHOW: WOMEN'S DAY

McCormick Place
What better way to prime your lady for V-Day than by bringing her to the nation's oldest and biggest car show? (\$10, \$7 for women; www.chicagoutoautoshow.com; 312-791-6543)

FEBRUARY 28

MV + EE

Empty Bottle
Matt Valentine and Erika Elder are the Sonny and Cher of freak folk. Sure to be a righteous and cosmic gathering. (\$8; www.emptybottle.com; 773-276-3600)

Columbus, Ohio

FEBRUARY 8

DONEWAITING.COM NEW MUSIC HAPPY HOUR

Surly Girl Saloon
Pirate paraphernalia abounds while blogger Robert Duffy and journalist Stephen Slaybaugh spin local music new and old. (Free; www.surlygirlsooloon.com; 614-294-4900)



Le One Night Stand at Bar 13 in New York

FEBRUARY 12-16

COLUMBUS FASHION WEEK

Venues TBA
Ohio's not exactly known as a fashion mecca, and while it's unclear who's really going to show up, Vincent from *Project Runway* was invited. (Price T&A; www.bobkupostrouts.com; 614-561-9240)

Detroit

WEDNESDAYS

SCRABBLE NIGHT

Firefly Club
Pile on the tiles during game night at this Ann Arbor hotspot, which features live jazz and blues bands on most nights and DJs playing slick soul and hip-hop on others. (\$5; www.fireflyclub.com)

FEBRUARY 5, 10, AND 18

BIRTY SHOW 8

Dirt's Warehouse
Scantly clad girls and boys,

superfluously festooned fetishists, lofty libertines, and 5,000 other erotica enthusiasts converge at this erstwhile office party turned massive international art exhibition. (\$15; www.dirtydetroit.com)

St. Louis

FRIDAYS

THAT '80S CLUB

Rue 13
Throwback tunes by synth-poppers (Duran Duran, Depeche Mode) and mullet heads (Journey, Bon Jovi) collide at this sushi-bar-cum-comfy-lounge on glitzy Washington Avenue. (\$4-\$6; 314-588-9797)

FEBRUARY 1

JUMBLING TOWERS

Cicero's
Jumbling Towers' theatrical quirk is rooted in artful U.K. post-punk and Brechtian cabaret; now they're curators of a

monthly concert series spotlighting the city's burgeoning indie-rock scene. (\$5-\$8; www.ciceros-stl.com; 314-662-0009)

FEBRUARY 17

MARDI GRAS' PYRAMID GRAND PARADE

Soulard
Grab your beads: In St. Louis, Mardi Gras weekend—especially in the French enclave Soulard—is the craziest, day-to-night party of the year. (Free; www.stlmardigras.org)

CONTRIBUTORS: Jake Austen, Lane Brown, Michael Byrne, Adam Croyton-Holland, Stephen Chen, Cottin Cowan, Niki Okavene, Chris DeVille, Virginia Ferris, Jamie Gadeite, Dina Gulubodoli, Timothy Gametlioka, Troy Johnson, Janet Keene, Tom Kelly, Danny Le, Ali Colleen Neff, Frederick Noble, Hunter Stephenson, Krissy Tegerstrom, Sally Timmes, Annie Zaleski

↓ MY FAVORITE BAR!

Charlie Brown's

980 Grant St., Denver; 303-860-1655

BY ROBERT SCHNEIDER OF THE APPLES IN STEREO



"Charlie Brown's is an awesome bar in the lobby of this old-school hotel in downtown Denver. They have great drinks and sandwiches. There's a somewhat elderly, blind piano player who sings jazz and swing-era standards: Hoagy Carmichael and Nat King Cole stuff. It's a taste of the past you can't get in many places now—it's like you're in a Woody Allen movie."

→ The Apples in Stereo's *New Magnetic Wonder* (Simian/Yep Roc) is out now.





cruising Haight. Cavernous vintage-clothing mecca **Wasteland** (1660 Haight St., 415-863-3150) is ground zero for everything from '80s prom dresses to retro concert tees. **Super Shoe Biz** (1420 Haight St., 415-861-0313) sells mod boots and the like, while down the street, **Shoe Biz II** (1553 Haight St., 415-861-3933) features kicks for days. At the enormous independent record store **Amoeba Music** (1855 Haight St., 415-831-1200), immerse yourself in row after row of vinyl, new and used CDs, rare posters, DVDs, and videos. Amoeba has also hosted in-store performances by the likes of Hot Chip, Ghostface Killah, and Band of Horses.

Lunch

THE ALEMBIC

1725 Haight St.
At this utterly refined retreat, pull up a seat at the old-worldy wood bar (constructed of bleachers from the original Kezar Stadium) and order a finely crafted Sazerac to go with your fries and jerk chicken wings. (415-666-0822)

Afternoon

GOLDEN GATE PARK

At the **Japanese Tea Garden** (415-750-4277) you can have jasmine tea with a backdrop of a crimson pagoda and a bronze Buddha. Stop at the **de Young Museum** (50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr., 415-863-3330) for a photo op from the observation tower and a refresher on punk fashion at the Vivienne Westwood retrospective, which begins in March. Exit at the northeastern end of the park and proceed to 2400 Fulton St., site of Jefferson Airplane's house, a.k.a. the Mansion. (Attention closet Olsen twins fanatics: The Victorian houses known as the Painted Ladies that are featured in the opening credits of *Full House* are located nearby at Alamo Square.)

Complete the Truffaut experience and snag a seat on the patio out back. (415-564-5332)

Midmorning

HAIGHT STREET
After breakfast, meander down Ashbury Street for a look at the house where the Grateful Dead lived (710 Ashbury St.) before



Jimi Hendrix shreds at the Fillmore West, 1968.

Valid Thursday Only \$3.00

Dinner

LITTLE STAR PIZZA

846 Divisadero St.
This cozy, low-lit, deep-dish pizza institution is pretty much always packed. No matter. Chill at the bar with a glass of the reasonably priced Côté du Rhône, and when you finally get a table, order the Little Star—a spinach, tomato, ricotta, and mushroom slice of heaven, if heaven had an awesome cornmeal crust. (415-442-1118)

Evening

No trip to San Francisco is complete without a metaphorical swing from the chandeliers at the **Fillmore** (1805 Geary Blvd., 415-346-6000), with the ghos



ts of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin looking on. Midsize clubs **Slim's** (333 11th St., 415-255-0333) and the independent (628 Divisadero St., 415-771-1421) offer a variety of indie rock, punk, hip-hop, and reggae; the subterranean **Café de Nord** (2170 Market St., 415-861-5016) serves up a 'saw them play a speakeasy before they were huge' experience, and **Blimbo's 365 Club** (1025 Columbus Ave., 415-476-0365), which opened in 1933, is a stylish setting for midlevel rock and pop acts (like Scissor Sisters and Stephen Malkmus). On Friday nights hit the **Richshaw** Stop (155 Fell St., 415-861-2011) for the weekly electro hip-hop dance party Club Loaded.

Nightcap

SPARKY'S 24 HOUR DINER

242 Church St.
This late-night greasy spoon—located in wonder-of-the-gay-world the Castro—features burgers (with obligatory veggie options) and all the fixings, but you're really there for the jukebox and 3 a.m. people-watching. (415-626-8666)

72 HOURS IN

San Francisco

Home of the Summer of Love, freak folk, Rice-A-Roni, and rising bands like Two Gallants and Birdmonster, San Francisco breeds originality like Fox creates reality TV shows. The bad news: You can't hop a cable car at every corner. The good news: You'll never go thirsty for soy milk. BY MELISSA GOLDSTEIN

WHERE TO STAY

While neighborhoods like Pacific Heights feature more scenic bed-and-breakfasts, for a central base of operations, camp out downtown.

PHOENIX HOTEL

601 Eddy St.
Home to almost-famous indie-rock up-and-comers, the steadily located but retro-outfitted Phoenix has a *Melrose Place*-worthy pool just begging for an "I am a golden god" moment. Weekend rates start at \$99. (415-776-1380)

HOTEL TRITON

342 Grant Ave.
This eco-friendly Union Square-adjacent boutique hotel features rooms decorated by Carlos Santana and Jerry Garcia, and a nightly wine reception. Weekend rates start at \$123. (415-394-0500)

Getting There

On-demand shuttles and Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) trains serve both San Francisco International Airport and Oakland International Airport. Once you reach the city, the quality of public transportation isn't terrible, but pack your patience. Still, it's not worth renting a car: Plot your course via Muni (the bus/light-rail system) or BART (www.transinfo.org) and keep cash on hand for taxis (Luxor Cabs, 415-282-4141).

DAY 1

Breakfast

ZAZIE

941 Cole St.
Zazie's French cuisine comes with an authentic attitude to match, so don't even think of requesting substitutions. Order a cappuccino with your eggs Florentine and gingerbread pancakes garnished with roasted pears for the table.



The indie-rock jump-off Popscore at 330 Ritch

DAY 2

Breakfast

FERRY PLAZA FARMERS MARKET

One Ferry Building (Embarcadero at Market St.) Proceed directly to the Hayes Street Grill cart for the scrambled egg, Hobbs bacon, and tomato sandwich, served on an Acme baguette. (415-291-3276)

Middmorning

YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

On-the-cusp urban artists exhibit next to renowned Artforum types. Screening through March 4, *Underplayed: A Mix Tape of Music-Based Videos* is an installation featuring ingenious productions like Ho Tzu Nyen's take on "Bohemian Rhapsody," in which inmates stage the rock opera in a Singapore courtroom. (415-978-2700)

Lunch

IRISH BANK BAR & RESTAURANT

10 Mark Lane Alex P. Keaton types abound on weekdays, but come Saturday, an anything-goes crowd congregates in the alley where this pub is situated. Order the fish and chips and earn points for authenticity by washing them down with a pint of Guinness. (415-788-7152)

Afternoon

CITY LIGHTS BOOKSTORE

261 Columbus Ave. Take a quick walk through Chinatown, ending up in Italian-themed North Beach. Pick up some reading for the trip home at this literary landmark, where cofounder Lawrence Ferlinghetti helped define the Beat Generation by publishing Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. (415-362-8193)

((SPIN.COM))

Planning a trip to San Francisco? Find maps, videos, and other crucial links by logging on to www.spin.com/sanfransour

Dinner

CITIZEN THAI AND THE MONKEY

1268 Grant Ave. One part Bangkok noodle bar, one part upscale Thai restaurant, this beloved corner eatery offers pad Thai standards and standouts like pumpkin curry. Sit upstairs for a view of North Beach, and dine under hanging lanterns in a room divided by a fishpond that makes you feel a bit like you're strolling in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. (415-364-0008)

Evening

Mezzanine (444 Jessie St., 415-625-8880) boasts a lineup ranging from Diplo-caliber Dis to Blonde Redhead to punk vets the Buzzcocks. Popscore (www.popscore-st.com) is famous for its Thursday night residency at 330 Ritch (330 Ritch St., 415-541-9574), but the traveling indie-rock nightclub also sponsors the monthly Britpop Saturday night special *Leisure* at Annie's Social Club (917 Folsom St., 415-974-1585). For cover-free dancing, try the kitschy *Beauty Bar* (2295 Mission St., 415-285-0323), and if you're wary of weekend warriors, the *Hemlock Tavern* (1131 Polk St., 415-923-0925) has pool tables and a smoking lounge up front.

DAY 3

Breakfast

TARTINE BAKERY

600 Guerrero St. The draw is the bread pudding—made with house-baked brioche and available with Schärffen Berger chocolate or seasonal fruit toppings. Order at the counter, and scout for a seat at a sidewalk table. (415-487-2600)

City Lights *underground* *Lawrence* *Ferlinghetti*



Middmorning

THE MISSION

Peruse the taxidermy and preserved insects at oddity shop *Paxton Gate* (824 Valencia St., 415-824-1872), stock up on DIY goods at zine store and gallery *Needles and Pens* (3253 16th St., 415-255-1534), rub elbows with the literati and check out a variety of pirate-themed items at Dave Eggers' *826 Valencia* storefront (826 Valencia St., 415-642-5905), and recaffeinate with a cup of what many contend is the best coffee in town at *Ritual Coffee Roasters* (1026 Valencia St., 415-641-1024).

Lunch

La Taqueria (2889 Mission St., 415-285-7117) lives by the rule of divine portions, with generous dollops of guac, and Beck has given impromptu performances at *Pancho Villa* (3071 16th St., 415-864-8840). But if table margaritas and mariachi bands are in order, it's *Puerto Alegre* (546 Valencia St., 415-255-8201).

Afternoon

ZEITGEIST

199 Valencia St. This bike-bar-cum-alterna-dive is the perfect afternoon spot. The house specialty is a Bloody Mary served strong and spicy with pickled veggies in a pint glass. (415-255-7505)

Dinner

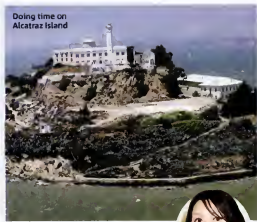
WALZWERK

560 Larkin St. East German meets East Village. The visages of Marx, Lenin, and Engels keep an eye on things from one wall, while hipsters sip beer with their schnitzel. (415-551-7181)

Evening

Intimate rock venue *Boston of the Hill* (1233 17th St., 415-621-4455) inspires a cultlike loyalty thanks to its unpretentious vibe, usually including sawdust on the floor. Nearby, *The Parkside* (1600 17th St., 415-503-0393) goes country for its Twang Sundays and is de facto headquarters for Noise Pop when the indie festival runs up in late February.

Doing time on Alcatraz Island



Bay Watch

STEPPING OUT ON THE TOWN WITH SATOMI MATSUZAKI OF DEERHOOF

KISS RESTAURANT

1700 Laguna St. *Satomis* says: "About 12 people fit in Kiss, and there's only one chef. The chef is not a talkative person, but he is able to sense what the customer wants that day. It's an amazing skill."

THE FLOWER GARDENS IN GOLDEN GATE PARK

"Just like walking around and noticing all the flowers and cactuses. It reminds me of Shinjuku Gyoen near my parents' house in Tokyo."

SAIGON SANDWICH SHOP

560 Larkin St. "Saigon is a Vietnamese sandwich take-out only place. The tofu is great! Two dollars! They recently took down the tip box. I admire an ungreedy business like this one."

ICHIBAN KAN

22 Peace Plaza No. 54 "The 99-storey in Japan town. Japanese snacks are so fun! Poky chocolate comes with cake packaging. I think some Japanese chocolates beat the expensive Belgian chocolates that I've had in Europe."

GOODWILL

822 Geary St. "My favorite purchase was a stuffed kitty that was made in Korea. She has a big head like Hello Kitty, with hidden eyes."

THE WESTIN ST. FRANCIS HOTEL

335 Powell St. "At night, I get on the St. Francis elevator that faces Union Square and just go up

and down. When you reach the top, you can see the city's night view."

STAGS' LEAP WINERY

6350 Silverado Trail, Napa "I love California wine. I don't talk about aroma with wine friends, though. I am not like the guys and women in the movie *Sideways*. Recently, I had Stags' Leap California red, 2003. Good wine. I visit wineries when my friends visit from Japan, but I'm the driver so I never get to taste tasting."

RYOKO RESTAURANT AND BAR

639 Taylor St. "Ryoko used to have a karaoke machine, and I enjoyed singing Japanese '80s and '90s pop songs. It's still a good place. They're open until 2 a.m. and serve a Japanese *izakaya* menu [small portions of food with sake or other drinks in a lounge/bar]."

THE GREAT AMERICAN MUSIC HALL

859 O'Farrell St. "Deerhoof often perform at Great American Music Hall. It reminds me of Versailles in Paris—like the ballroom decor. It's odd to listen to rock in a classical-style building. That's why I like it."

ALCATRAZ PRISON

San Francisco Bay "There is a restaurant called Alcatraz in Tokyo. Customers can experience being locked up in a jail with handcuffs. You also get to be treated like a criminal. I visited the real Alcatraz [now a historic site], which was okay, but Alcatraz in Japan seems more interesting."



"Awww Sh--, Look Who Got a Web Site"

How Ryan Adams (of all people) became an Internet visionary BY MELISSA MAERZ

IF YOU PUT A NICKEL IN THE BANK every time the word *prolific* appeared in print before Ryan Adams' name, you'll have saved enough by next year to buy a Ferrari Enzo that's been dipped in beluga caviar and bedazzled with pink sapphires. And if Adams released all the songs he'd written while your funds accrued, making them available for 99 cents each, you still wouldn't have enough money to download them all.

Now, there are probably many complex reasons why Adams—who put out no fewer than three albums in 2005, including the stellar jam-bandy double disc *Cold Roses*—releases so much work. I won't pretend to psychoanalyze his motives, though I believe the simple answer he gave on his website: "I like to play music when I'm not busy playing music." But last December, when he posted 13 very funny novelty albums on his homepage—attributed to such alter egos as chill rapper DJ Reggie, screamo outfit WereWolph, and bratty punks the Shit—I wondered if the move was a direct response to folks who'd complained about his unrunned output on Stereogum a few months earlier. "I have learned how to use a cool thing on my computer which basically allows me now to never ever stop recording music ever," Adams wrote on ryan-adams.com, "Which is going to be great news for all my adoring fans." To wit: You think I've recorded too much? Wait until you hear my 113,236,857th record, an ode to every idea I've had since lunch.

The funny thing is, Adams probably has more in common with those who read Stereogum than he thinks. His faux hip-hop and punk tracks like "Awww Shit, Look Who Got a Web Site" and "1-800-WWW.COM" just underscore the speed of the hype machine he's bucking. Accelerated technology breeds accelerated culture, and in a blogosphere obsessed with newness (breaking unheard bands, leaking forthcoming albums first), Adams' hyperproductivity seems like a smart move—or at least a knowing wink. If there's one thing DJ Reggie tracks such as "Unicorns (Prob. Don't Exist)" can teach you—besides that the fact that unicorns probably don't exist—it's that pumping out the new song every hour might be the only way to keep up in this Band of the Day age. Every time you hear a new Ryan Adams song, an angel updates his blog.

Strangely, the biggest complaint people have posted about Adams is the same argument out-of-touch pundits once used about the Internet: There's too much information out there, and not enough of it has been edited. It's surprising that

the same people who celebrate the Web for breaking down mainstream media's cultural gatekeeping now want something very old-fashioned: a new filter to tell them which of this stuff is any good.

Sure, Ryan Adams could never whittle his career down to a greatest-hits collection. But the best thing about him—and about the blogs that write about him—is that there's no pressure to package things for a large audience. Their appeal is that they inspire loyalty from a relatively small group of devotees. Online, the sheer availability of self-expression is already turning mass

culture into a conglomeration of niches, and Adams—who has recorded a Jacksonville country album, a Midwestern bar-rock album, a Smiths-inspired brooder album, a backpacker rap album, a Deadhead noodler album—is a niche rocker for our times. You want a hip-hop song about the history of the pyramids? He's written several of them. And maybe that's what it means to really connect with an artist: feeling as if he wrote something specifically for you.

These days, it takes almost as much effort to be a Ryan Adams fan as it does to be Ryan Adams. And I suspect that's the way Adams wants it. He's created an environment that leaves no room to surf through the latest, hottest MySpace tracks: Listening to all of his music takes time. Time to ponder the political feasibility of WereWolph's "Dead People Unite and Take Over." Time to understand the subtle differences between the Shit singles "Drinking Hard," "I Drink Too Much," "Drunk as Hell Again," "Drunk and in Jail for Arson," and "Passed Out in AA—Fuck." Time to figure out if the Shit's "When Pants Become Toilets" could be turned into a Fox TV show. On that December day when Adams issued the first 11 albums, I spent eight hours listening to all of them, trading e-mails with friends about the genius of WereWolph's "Throw Up on the Moon," debating with coworkers about whether DJ Reggie's backing tracks could pass for Neptunes beats, laughing when Adams cracks up on DJ Reggie's "Blanky Night Time Friend." Some people may think there are more important things to do with one's afternoon—say, breathing or eating. But I haven't spent that many hours with one musician since I was 16 (which, coincidentally, happens to be the last time I was too stoned to figure out how to eject a CD). And if Adams continues on this path, I look forward to spending another 1,274,123,657,586 days just like that. ☘

Melissa Maerz is Spin's associate editor.





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